MISS PRIM-ROSE

ROY ROLFE GILSON

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Miss Primrose

A Novel

by

Roy Rolfe Gilson

Author of "The Flower of Youth"
"In the Morning Glow" etc.

New York and London
Harper & Brothers
Publishers :: MCMVI

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Published March, 1906.

Contents

PART I

A Devonshire Lad

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Letitia	3
II.	Little Rugby	13
III.	A Poet of Grassy Ford	27
IV.	The Seventh Slice	43
V.	The Handmaiden	61
VI.	Cousin Dove	71
VII.	Of Hamadryads and Their Spells	88

PART II

The School-Mistress

I.	The Older Letitia	101
II.	On a Corner Shelf	113
III.	A Younger Robin	123
IV.	Hiram Ptolemy	136
V.	A. P. A.	150
VI.	Truants in Arcady	164
VII.	Peggy Neal	177
VIII.	New Eden	188
IX.	A Serious Matter	202

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Contents

PART III

Rosemary

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Home-keeper	211
II.	Johnny Keats	219
III.	The Fortune-teller	234
IV.	An Unexpected Letter	244
V.	Surprises	252
VI.	An Old Friend of Ours	264
VII.	Suzanne	275
VIII.	In a Devon Lane	287

PART I

A Devonshire Lad

Miss Primrose

I

LETITIA

ALL little, white-haired, smiling ladies remind me of Letitia—Letitia Primrose, whom you saw just now in a corner of our garden among the petunias. You thought her odd, no doubt, not knowing her as I or as the children do who find her dough-nuts sweet after school is done, or their English cousins, those little brown-feathered beggars waiting on winter mornings in the snow-drifts at her sill. As for myself, I must own to a certain kinship, as it were, not of blood but of propinquity, a long next-doorhood in our youth, a tenderer, nameless tie in after years, and always a fond partiality which began one day by our old green

fence. There, on its Primrose side, it seems, she had parted the grape-vines, looking for fruit, and found instead—

"Why! whose little boy is this?"

Now, it happened to be Bertram, Jonathan Weatherby's little boy—it being a holiday, and two pickets off, and the Concords purple in a witchery of September sheen—though at first he could make no sign to her of his parentage, so surprised he was, and his mouth so crammed.

"Will I die?" he asked, when he had gulped down all but his tongue.

"Die!" she replied, laughing at his grave, round eyes and pinching his nearer cheek. "Do I look like an ogress?"

"No," he said; "but I've gone and swallowed 'em."

"The grapes?"

"No—yes—but I mean the pits," whereat she laughed so that his brow darkened.

"Well, a man *did* once."

"Did what?"

"Died—from swallowin' 'em."

"Who told you that?"

"Maggie did."

"And who is Maggie?"

"Why, you know Maggie. She's our hired girl."

"How many did you swallow?"

"Five."

"Five!"

"Or six, I guess. I'm not quite sure."

"What made you do it?"

"I didn't. *You* did."

"*I* made you swallow them?"

"Why, yes, 'cause, now, I had 'em in my mouth—"

"Six all at once!"

"Yes, and you went and scared me. I forgot to think."

"Mercy! I'm sorry, darling."

"My name isn't darling. It's Bertram."

"I'm sorry, Bertram."

"Oh, that's all right," he forgave her, cheerfully, "as long as I don't die like the man did; you'll know pretty soon, I guess."

"How shall I know?"

"Well, the man, he hollered. You could hear him 'cross lots, Maggie says. So, if you listen, why, pretty soon you'll know."

And it is due partly to the fact that Letitia Primrose, listening, heard no hollering across lots, that I am able here to record the very

day and hour when I first met her; partly that, and partly because Letitia has a better memory than Jonathan Weatherby's little boy, for I do not remember the thing at all and must take her word for it.

She was not gray then, of course. It must have been a pink, sweet, merry face that peered at me through the grape-vines, and a ringing laugh in those days, and two plump fingers that pinched my cheek. Her hair was brown and hung in braids, she tells me. She may have been fourteen.

I do not remember her so young. I do remember hugging some one and being hugged, next door—once in the bay-window by the red geraniums, whose scent still bears to me some faint, sweet airs of summers gone. It was not a relative who hugged me; I know by the feeling—the remembered feeling—for I was dutiful but not o'er keen in the matter of kissing our kith and kin. No, it was some one who took me by surprise and rumpled me, some one who seemed, somehow, to have the right to me, though not by blood—some one too who was nearer my age than most of our relatives, who were not so young and round and luring as I recall them.

It was some one kneeling, so that our heads were even. The carpet was red, I remember. I had run in from play, I suppose, and she was there, and I—I may have been irresistible in those days. At least I know it was not I, but Eve who—

That must have been Letitia. I have never asked, but it was not Cousin Julia, or the Potter girl, or Sammy's sister. Excluding the rest of the world, I infer Letitia. And why not kiss me? She kissed Sammy, that fat, little, pudding-head Sammy McSomething, who played the mouth-organ. Since of all the tunes in the world he knew but one (you know which one), it may seem foolish that I cared; but, remember, I played none! And she kissed him *for* playing—kissed him, pudgy and vulgar as he was with the fetty-bag tied to his neck by a dirty string to ward off contagions! Ugh! I swore a green, green oath to learn the accordion.

That night in bed—night of the day she kissed him—with only the moon-lamp burning outside my window, I felt that my cheeks were wet. I had been thinking. It had come to me awfully as I tossed, that I had been born too late—for Letitia. Always I should be too young for her.

Dear Letitia, white and kneeling even then, perhaps, at your whiter prayers, or reading after them, before you slept, in the *Jane Eyre* which lay for years beneath your pillow, you did not dream that you also were a heroine of romance. You did not dream of the plot then hatching in the night: plot with a villain in it — oh, beware, Letitia, of a pudgy, vulgar, superstitious villain wearing a charmed necklace of assafœtida to ward off evils, but powerless, even quite odorless against that green-eyed one! For, lo! Letitia: thy Hero standing beneath thy chamber-window in the moonbeams, is singing soprano to the gentle bellowsings of early love!

No, I do not play the accordion, nor did I ever. I never even owned one, so I never practised secretly in the barn-loft, nor did I ever, after all my plotting, lure young Sammy to play "Sweet Home" to our dear lady in the moonshine, only to be eclipsed, to his dire confusion and everlasting shame, by me. It may have been that I had no pocket-money, or that Santa Claus was short that year in his stock of wind-instruments, or that Jonathan Weatherby had no ear for melody about the house, but it is far

more likely that Letitia Primrose never again offended, to my knowledge, in the matter of pudgy little vulgar boys.

Now, as I muse the longer of that fair young lady who lived next door to us, as I see myself crawling through the place with the pickets off, and recall beyond it the smell and taste of the warm Concords in my petty larcenies of a dozen autumns, then other things come back to me, of Letitia's youth, of its cares and sacrifice and its motherlessness. The Rev. David Primrose, superannuate divine, bard and scholar, lived mostly in a chair, as I recall him, and it was Letitia who wheeled him on sunny days when other girls were larking, who sat beside it in the bay-window, half-screened by her geraniums, reading to him when his eyes were weary, writing for him, when his hand trembled, those fine fancies that helped him to forget his sad and premature decay. She was his only child, his only housemaid, gardener, errand-boy, and "angel," as mother said, and the mater went sometimes to sit evenings with him lest Letitia should never know joys of straw-rides and taffy-pulls and church-sociable ice-cream and cake.

He had a fine, white, haggard face, too stern

for a little child to care for, but less forbidding to a growing school-boy who had found by chance that it softened wonderfully with memories of that Rugby where Tom Brown went to school; for Dr. Primrose had conned his Xenophon within those very ivied-walls, and, what was more to Bertram Weatherby, under those very skies had fled like Tom, a hunted hare, working fleet wonders in the fields of Warwickshire.

"A mad March hare I was, Bertram," he would tell me, the light of his eyes blazing in that little wind of a happy memory, only to sink and go out again. Smoothing then with his fine, white hands the plaid shawl which had been his wife's and was now a coverlet for his wasted knees, he would say, sadly:

"Broomsticks, Bertram — but in their day there were no fleeter limbs in Rugby."

There on my upper shelf is an old, worn, dusty copy of the *Odes of Horace*, which I cannot read, but it bears on its title-page, in a school-boy's scrawl, the name and date for which I prize it:

"David Buckleton Primrose, Rugby, A.D. 18—."

He laughed as he gave it to me.

"Mark, Bertram," said he, "the 'A.D.'"

"Thank you, sir," I replied, tremulously. "You bet I'll always keep it, Mr. Primrose."

"*Dr.* Primrose," he reproved me, gently.

"Doctor, I mean. Maybe Tom had one like it."

"Likely," he replied. "You must learn to read it."

"Oh, I will, sir—and Greek."

"That's right, my boy. Remember always what Dr. Primrose said when he gave you Horace: that no gentleman could have pretensions to sound culture who was not well-grounded in the classics. Can you remember that?"

Twice he made me repeat it.

"Oh yes, sir, I can remember it," I told him. "Do you suppose Tom put in his name like that?"

"Doubtless," said Dr. Primrose, "minus the A.D."

"I didn't know you had a middle name," I said.

"Buckleton was my mother's maiden name," he explained. "She was of the Wiltshire Buckletons, and a very good family, too."

"David Buckleton Primrose," I read aloud.

"Lineal descendant of Dr. Charles Primrose,

Vicar of Wakefield," added the minister, so solemnly that I fairly caught my breath. I had no notion then of whom he spoke, but there was that in the chant of his deep voice and the pleasant, pompous sound he gave the title, which awed me so I could only stare at him, and then at Horace, and then at him again, as he lay back solemnly in his chair, regarding me with half-shut eyes. Slowly a smile overspread his features.

"I was only jesting. Did you never hear of the *Vicar of Wakefield?*"

"No," I said.

"There: that little yellow book on the third shelf, between the green ones. He was its hero, a famous character of Oliver Goldsmith's. He also was a clergyman, and his name was Primrose."

"Oh," I said, "and did he go to Rugby, sir?"

Now, though the doctor laughed and shook his head, somehow I got that notion in my noddle, and to this very day must stop to remember that the vicar was not a Rugby boy. I have even caught myself imagining that I had read somewhere, or perhaps been told, that his middle name was Buckleton. One thing, of course, was true of both Primroses: they lived A.D.

II

LITTLE RUGBY

HUNTING fox-grapes on a Saturday in fall, or rambling truantly on a fair spring morning, and chuckling to hear the school-bells calling in vain to us across the meadows, it was fine to say:

"Gee! If there was only a game-keeper to get into a row with!"

And then hear Peter's answer:

"Gee, yes! Remember how Velveteens caught Tom up a tree?"

It was fine, I say, because it proved that Peter, too, knew *Tom Brown's School Days*, and all about Slogger Williams and Tom's fight with him, all about East and Arthur and Dr. Arnold, and Tom in the last chapter standing alone in the Rugby chapel by the doctor's grave.

One night in winter I remember keeping watch

—hard-pressed was Cæsar by the hordes of Gaul —a merest stripling from among the legions, stealthily deserted post, braving the morrow's reckoning to linger in delicious idleness by his father's shelves. There, in a tattered copy of an old *Harper's*, whose cover fluttered to the hearth-rug, his eyes fell upon a set of drawings of a gate, a quadrangle, a tower door with ivy over it, a cricket-field with boys playing and scattering a flock of sheep, a shop (at this his eyes grew wider)—a mere little Englishy village-shop, to be sure, but not like others, for this, indeed, was Sallie Harrowell's, where Tom bought baked potatoes and a pennyworth of tea! And out of one full, dark page looked Dr. Arnold—a face as fine and wise and tender as Bertram Weatherby had fancied it, so that he turned from it but to turn back again, thinking how Tom had looked upon its living presence in more wondrous days. Cæsar's deserter read and looked, and looked and read again, beside the hearth, forgetting the legions in the Gallic wilds, forgetting the Roman sentry calls for the cries of cricketers, and seeing naught but the guarded wickets on an English green and how the sheep browsed peacefully under the windows in the vines.

Schoolward next morning Rugby and Cæsar nestled together beneath his arm. He found his Little Rugby on a hill—a red brick school-house standing awkwardly and solemn-eyed in its threadbare playground, for all the world like a poor school-master, impoverished without, well stocked within. It was an ugly, mathematical-looking Rugby, austere and angular, and without a shred of vine or arching bough for birds or dreams to nest in, yet Bertram Weatherby hailed it joyfully, ran lightly up its painted steps, and flung wide open its great hall-door. A flood of sound gushed forth—laughter, boisterous voices, chatter of girls, and the movement of restless feet. Across the threshold familiar faces turned, smiling, familiar voices rose from the tumult, his shoulders tingled with the buffets of familiar hands.

"Hello, Bildad!"

"Hello, old saw-horse!"

"Hello, yourself! Take *that!*"

But suddenly, in the midst of these savage greetings, that gentle pressure of an arm about him, and Peter's voice:

"Hello, old man!"

Bertram would whirl at that, his face beam-

ing; they had met but yesterday — it was as years ago—"Hello, old man! Look, Peter!"

But a gong clanged. Then all about them was the hurry and tramp of feet upon the stairs. Lost in the precious pages, they climbed together, arm in arm, drifting upward with the noisy current and through the doors of the assembly-hall.

"See, Bertram—the cricket-bats on the wall!"

"Yes; and the High Street—and Sallie Harrowell's!"

"And the doctor's door!"

Through another door just then their own masters were slowly filing, their own doctor last and weightiest of all, his smooth, strong face busy with some chapel reverie.

"The Professor's like Arnold," Bertram told Peter as they slipped together into their double seat.

The last gong clanged. There was a last bang of seats turned down, a last clatter of books upon the desks, the last belated, breathless ones fluttered down aisles with reddened cheeks, while the Professor waited with the Bible open in his hand.

"Let us read this morning the one-hundred-and-seventh Psalm—Psalm one hundred seven."

Peter was in Rugby, hidden by the girl in front. The boy named Bertram fixed his gaze upon the desk before him. Fair and smooth it was—too smooth with newness to please a Rugbeian eye. During the Psalm, with his pocket-knife he cut his initials in the yellow wood, and smiled at them. In days to come other boys would sit where he was sitting, and gaze and puzzle over that rude legacy, and, if dreams came true, might be proud enough to sprawl their elbows where a famous man had lolled. They might even hang the old seat-top upon the wall, that all who ran might read the glory of an *alma mater* in the disobedience of a mighty son. Bertram Weatherby gazed fondly upon his handiwork and closed his knife. Time and Destiny must do the rest.

"Let us pray."

For a moment the Professor stood there silently with lowered eyes. Bertram and Peter, their shoulders touching, bowed their heads.

"*Our Father in heaven . . .*"

There was no altar—only a flat-topped desk; no stained-glass windows—only the sunshine on the panes; and there a man's voice, deep and trembling, and here a school-boy's beating heart.

"... *Help us, O Father, to be kinder* ..."

How you loved Peter, the Professor, and your ugly Rugby on its hill!

"... *Lead us, O Father, to a nobler youth* ..."

Ay, they should know you for the man you were, deep down in your hidden soul.

"... *Give us, O Father, courage for the battle* ..."

Wait till the next time Murphy bumped you on the stairs!

"... *to put behind us all indolence of flesh and soul* ..."

You would study hard that term.

"... *all heedlessness and disobedience* ..."

You would keep the rules.

"... *for Jesus' sake—Amen.*"

"Peter, did you see the sheep ..."

"If the two young gentlemen *whispering* on the back seat—"

You flushed angrily. Other fellows whispered on back seats. Why, always, did the whole school turn so knowingly to you?

Sitting, one study-hour, in the assembly-hall, Bertram's eyes wandered to the top of the *Commentaries*, strayed over the book to the braids of the Potter girl beyond, and on to the long,

brown benches. The hum of recitations there, whispering behind him, giggling half suppressed, and the sharp rat-tat of the teacher's warning pencil came to him vaguely as in a dream. Through the tall windows he saw the spotless blue of the sky, the bright-green, swaying tips of the maples, and the flight of wings. Out there it was spring. Two more months of Cæsar—eight more dreary weeks of legions marching and barbarians bending beneath the yoke — then summer and the long vacation, knights jousting in the orchard, Indians scalping on the hill. Eight weeks—forty days of school.

Behind a sheltering grammar Peter was reading Hughes. Over his shoulder Bertram could make out Tom, just come to Rugby, watching the football, and that cool Crab Jones, fresh from a scrimmage, with the famous straw still hanging from his teeth. He read to the line of Peter's shoulder, then his eyes wandered again to the school-room window. It was spring in Grassy Ford—it was spring in Warwickshire. . . .

"If the young *gentleman* gazing out of the window—"

"*Tertia vigilia eruptionem fecerunt*" — third watch — eruption — they made. *Eruptionem* —

eruption — pimples — break out — sally. They made a sally at the third watch. *Tertia vigilia*, ablative case. Ablative of what? Ablative of time. Why ablative of time? Because a noun denoting — oh, hang their *eruptionem!* They were dead and buried long ago. Why does a fellow learn such stuff? Help his English—huh! English helps his Latin — that's what. *How* does a fellow know *eruptionem?* Because he's seen pimples — that's how. No sense learning Latin. Dead language — dead as a door-nail. . . .

Bertram Weatherby drew a picture on the margin of his book—a head, shoulders, two arms, a trunk—and trousered legs. Carefully, then, he dotted in the eyes—the nose—the mouth—the ears beneath the tousled hair. He rolled the shirt-sleeves to the elbows—drew the trousers-belt — the shoes. Then delicately, smiling to himself the while, his head tilted, his eyes squinted like a connoisseur, he drew a straw pendent from the figure's lips.

"Peter, who's that?"

"Sh! not so loud. She'll hear you."

"Who's that, Peter?"

"Hm—Crab Jones."

"Now, if the idle young gentleman drawing *pictures*—"

"*Tertia vigilia eruptionem fecerunt*"—oh, they did, did they? What of that? . . .

"Rugby," said the Professor, who had a way of enlivening his classes with matters of the outer world—"Rugby, as I have heard my friend Dr. Primrose say, who was a Rugby boy himself, is very different from our public schools. Only the other day he was telling me of a school-mate, a professor now, who had returned to England, and who had spent a day there rambling about the ivied buildings, and searching, I suppose, for the ancient form where he had carved his name. Dr. Primrose told me how, as this old friend lingered on the greensward where the boys played cricket, as he himself had done on that very spot — fine, manly fellows in their white flannels — he heard not a single oath or vulgar word in all that hour he loitered there. One young player called to another who ran too languidly after the ball. '*Aren't* you playing, Brown?' he cried, with a touch of irony in his voice."

The Professor paused.

"I have heard stronger language on our playground here."

He paused again, adding, impressively:

"We might do well to *imitate* our English cousins."

"Just what *I* say," whispered young Bertram Weatherby.

"The Prof.'s all right," Peter whispered back.

And so, down-town, after school that day, behold!—sitting on stools at Billy's Palace Lunch Counter, in the Odd Fellow's Block—two fine, manly chaps, not in white cricket flannels, to be sure, but—

"It's *some* like Sallie Harrowell's," one mumbled, joyously, crunching his buttered toast, and the other nodded, taking his swig of tea.

So it came to pass that they looked reverently upon the Professor with Rugbeian eyes, and more admiringly as they noted new likenesses between him and the great head-master. There was a certain resemblance of glowing countenance, they told themselves, a certain ardor of voice, as they imagined, and over all a sympathy for boys.

"Well," he would say, "stopping them as they walked together arm in arm, "if you seek

Peter, look for Bertram — eh?" giving their shoulders a bantering shake which pleased them greatly as they sauntered on.

Listening to his prayers in chapel, hearing at least the murmur of them as they bowed their heads, their minds swayed by the earnestness of the great man's voice rather than by the words he uttered, they felt that glow which comes sometimes to boys who read and dream. Then Bertram loved the touch of Peter's shoulder, and, with the memory of another doctor and another school-boy, he loved his Rugby, little and meagre and vineless though it was upon its threadbare hill. When he had left it he would return some day, he thought; he would stand like Tom in the last chapter; he would sit again at his old brown desk, alone, musing—missing his mate, and finding silence where happy whisperings and secret play had been—but still in the pine before him he would trace the letters he had cut, and, seeing them, he would be again the boy who cut them there.

One morning, such was the fervor of the Professor's voice, there was some such dream, and when it ended, prayer and dream together—

"After these exercises—"

It was the Professor's voice.

"—I wish to see in my office Bertram Weatherby and Peter Wynne."

They heard aghast. The whole school turned to them. The Past rose dreadfully before their startled vision, yet for once, it seems, they could find no blemish there.

Down-stairs, quaking, they slipped together through the office door. The Professor had not arrived. They took their stations farthest from his chair, and leaned, wondering, for support against the wall. There was a murmur of assembling classes overhead, a hurry of belated feet, and then—that well-known, awful tread. Peter gulped; Bertram shifted his feet, his heart thumping against his ribs, but they squared their shoulders as the door flew open and the Professor, his face grave, his eyes flashing, swooped down upon them in the little room.

"Bertram!"

"Yes, sir."

"Peter!"

"Yes, sir."

"I have sent for you to answer a most serious charge—most serious, indeed. I am surprised. I am astonished. Two of my best pupils, two

whom I have praised, not once but many times, here in this very room—two, I may say, of my favorite boys found violating, wilfully violating, the rules of this school. I could not believe the charge till I saw the evidence with my own eyes. I could not believe that boys like you—boys of good families, boys with minds far above the average of their age, would despoil, openly despoil—yes, I may say, ruthlessly despoil—the property of this school, descending—"

"Why, sir, what prop—"

"Descending," cried the Professor, "to vandalism—to a vandalism which I have again and again proscribed. Over and over I have said, and within your hearing, that I *would not countenance the defacing of desks!*"

Bertram Weatherby glanced furtively at Peter Wynne. Peter had sighed.

"Over and over," said the Professor, "I have told you that they were not your property or mine, but the property of the people whose representative I am. Yet here I find you marring their tops with jack-knives, carving great, sprawling letters—"

"But, sir, at Rug—"

"Great, ugly letters, I say, sprawling and

slashed so deeply that the polished surface can never be restored."

"At Rug—"

"What will visitors say? What will your parents say if they come, as parents should, to see the property for which they pay a tribute to the state?"

"But, sir, at Rug—"

"Bertram, I am grieved. I am grieved, Peter, that boys reared to care for the neatness of their persons should prove so slovenly in the matter of the property a great republic intrusts to their use and care."

"But, sir, at Rug—"

"I am astonished."

"At Rug—"

"I am astounded."

"At Rug—"

"Astounded, I repeat."

"At Rugby, sir—"

"*Rugby!*" thundered the Professor. "*Rugby!* And what of Rugby?"

"Why, at Rugby, sir—"

"And what, pray, has Rugby, or a thousand Rugbys, to do with your wilful disobedience?"

"They cut, sir—"

"*Cut*, sir!" repeated the Professor. "*Cut*, sir!"

"Yes, sir—their desks, sir."

"And if they do—what then?"

"Well, sir, you said, you know—"

"Said? What did I say? I asked you to imitate the manliness of Rugby cricketers. I did not ask you to carve your desks like the totem-poles of savage tribes!"

His face was pale, his eyes dark, his words ground fine.

"Young gentlemen, I will have you know that rules must be obeyed. I will have you know that I am here not only as a teacher, but as a guardian of the public property intrusted to my care. Under the rules which I am placed here to enforce, I can suspend you both—dismiss you from the privileges of the school. This once I will act with lenience. This once, young gentlemen, you may think yourselves lucky to escape with demerit marks, but if I hear again of conduct so unbecoming, so disgraceful, of vandalism so ruthless and absurd, I shall punish you as you deserve. Now go."

Softly they shut the office door behind them. Arm in arm they went together, tiptoe, down the empty hall.

"Well?"

The gloom of a great disappointment was in their voices.

"He's not an Arnold, after all," they said.

III

A POET OF GRASSY FORD

THE lesser Primrose was a poet. It was believed in Grassy Ford, though the grounds seem vague enough now that I come to think of them, that he published widely in the literary journals of the day. Letitia was seen to post large envelopes, and anon to draw large envelopes from the post-office and hasten home with them. The former were supposed to contain poems; the latter, checks. Be that as it may, I never saw the Primrose name in print save in our *Grassy Ford Weekly Gazette*. There, when gossip lagged, you would find it frequently in a quiet upper corner, set "solid," under the caption "Gems"—a terse distinction from the other bright matters with which our journal shone, and further emphasized by the Gothic capitals set in a scroll of stars. Thus

modestly, I believe, were published for the first time — and I fear the last — David Buckleton Primrose's "Agamemnon," "Ode to Jupiter," "Ulysses's Farewell," "Lines on Rereading Dante," "November: an Elegy Written in the Autumn of Life," as well as those stirring bugle-calls, "To Arms!" "John Brown," and "The Guns of Sumter," and those souvenirs of more playful tender moods, "To a Lady," "When I was a Rugby Lad," "Thanksgiving Pies," and "Lines Written in a Young Lady's Album on her Fifteenth Birthday." Now that young lady was Letitia, I chance to know, for I have seen the verses in her school-girl album, a little leathern Christmas thing stamped with forget-me-nots now faded, and there they stand just opposite some school-mate's doggerel of "roses red and violets blue" signed Johnny Gray. The lines begin, I remember:

"Virtue is in thy modest glance, sweet child,"

and they are written in a flourished, old-fashioned hand. These and every other line her father dreamed there in his chair Letitia treasures in a yellow scrap-book made of an odd volume

of Rhode Island statutes for 18—. There, one by one, as he wrote them, or cut them with trembling fingers from the fresh, ink-scented *Gazette*—"Gems," scroll and all, and with date attached—she set them neatly in with home-made paste, pressing flat each precious flower of his muse with her loving fingers.

Editor Butters used to tell me of the soft-eyed girl, "with virtue in her modest glance," slipping suddenly into his print-shop, preferably after dusk had fallen, and of the well-known envelope rising from some sacred folds, he never quite knew where, to be laid tremblingly upon his desk.

"Something from father, sir."

It was a faint voice, often a little husky, and then a smile, a bow, and she had fled.

Editor Nathaniel Butters had a weakness of the heart for all tender things — a weakness "under oath," however, as he once replied when I charged him with it, and as I knew, for I myself heard him one summer afternoon, as he sat, shirt-sleeved and pipe in mouth, perched on a stool, and setting type hard by a window where I stood beneath fishing with a dogwood wand.

"The-oc-ri-tus! Humpf! Now, who in thun-

der cares a tinker's damn for Theocritus, in Grassy Ford? Some old Greek god, I suppose, who died and went to the devil; and here's a parson—a Christian parson who ought to know better—writing an ode to him, for Hank Myers to read, and Jim Gowdy, and Old Man Flynn. And I don't get a cent for it, not a blank cent, Sam—well, he doesn't either, for that matter—but it's all tommy-rot, and here I've got to sweat, putting in capitals where they don't belong and hopping down to the darned old dictionary every five minutes to see if he's right—Sam [turning to his printer] there's some folks think it's just heaven to be a country editor, but I'll be—"

He was a rough, white-bearded, little, round, fat man, who showed me type-lice, I remember (the first and only time I ever saw the vermin), and roared when I wiped my eyes, though I've forgiven him. He was good to Letitia in an hour of need.

Dr. Primrose, it seems, had written his masterpiece, a solemn, Dr. Johnsonian thing which he named "Jerusalem," and reaching, so old man Butters told me once, chuckling, "from Friday evening to Saturday night." The muse had

granted him a longer candle than it was her wont to lend, and Letitia trembled for that sacred fire.

"Print it, child? Of course he'll print it. It's the finest thing I ever did!"

"True, father, but its length—"

"Not longer than Milton's 'Lycidas,' my dear."

"I know, but—he's so—he looks so fierce, father." She laughed nervously.

"Who? Butters?"

"Yes."

"Tut! Butters has brains enough—"

"It isn't his brains," replied Letitia. "It's his whiskers, father."

"Whiskers?"

"Yes; they bristle so."

"Don't be foolish, child. Butters has brains enough to know it is worth the printing. Worth the printing!" he cried, with irony. "Yes, even though it isn't dialect."

Dialect was then in vogue; no Grassy Ford, however small, in those days, but had its Rhyming Robin who fondly imagined that he might be another Burns.

"Dialect!" the doctor repeated, scornfully, his eyes roving to the shabby ancients on his

shelves. "Bring me Horace—that's a good girl. No—yes." His hand lingered over hers that offered him the book. "Child," he said, looking her keenly in the eyes, "do you find it so hard to brave that lion?"

"Oh no, father. I didn't mean I was afraid, only he's so — woolly. You can hardly make out his eyes, and fire sputters through his old spectacles. I think he never combs his hair."

"Does he ever grumble at you?"

"Oh no"—and here she laughed—"that is, I never give him time; I run away."

The old poet made no reply to her, but went on holding that soft little hand with the Horace in it, and gazing thoughtfully at his daughter's face.

"We can send it by mail," he said at last.

That roused Letitia.

"Oh, not at all!" she cried. "Why, I'm proud to take it, father. Mr. Butters isn't so dreadful —if he *is* fuzzy. I'm sure he'll print it. There was that letter from Mr. Banks last week, a column long, on carrots."

He smiled dryly at her over his opened book.

"If only my 'Jerusalem' were artichokes instead of Saracens!" he said.

The fuzzy one was in his lair, proof-reading at his unkempt desk. The floor was littered at his feet. He was smoking a black tobacco in a blacker pipe. He wore no coat, no cuffs, and his sleeves were—um; it does not matter. He glared ("carnivorously," Letitia tells me) at the opening door.

"Evening," he said, and waited; but the envelope did not arise. So he rose himself, offering a seat in the midst of his clutter, a plain, pine, rope-mended chair, from which he pawed soiled sheets of copy and tattered exchanges that she might sit.

"Looks some like snow," he said.

"Yes," she assented. "I called, Mr. Butters—"

She paused uncertainly. It was her own voice that had disconcerted her, it was so tremulous.

"Another poem, I suppose," he said, fondly imagining that he had softened his voice to a tone of gallantry, but succeeding no better than might be expected of speech so hedged, so beset and baffled, so veritably bearded in its earward flight.

"You—you mentioned snow, I think," stam-

mered Letitia. He had frightened her away, or she may have drawn back, half-divining, even in embarrassment, that the other, the more roundabout, the snowy path, was the better way to approach her theme.

"Snow and east winds are the predictions, I believe, Miss Primrose."

"I dread the winter—don't you?" she ventured.

"No," he replied. "I like it."

"That's because you are—"

"Because I'm so fat, you mean."

"Oh no, Mr. Butters, I didn't even think of that; I meant so—"

And then — heavens! — it flashed across her that she had meant "woolly"! To save her soul she could think of no synonyme. Her cheeks turned red.

"I meant—why, of course, I meant—you're so well prepared."

"Well prepared," he grumbled.

"Why, yes, you—men can wear beards, you know."

"Egad! you're right," he roared. "You're right, Miss Primrose. I *am* well mufflered, that's a fact."

"But, really, it must be a great assistance, Mr. Butters."

"Oh yes; it is—and it saves neckties."

And this, mark you, was the way to Poetry! Poor Letitia, with the manuscript hidden beneath her cloak, was all astray. The image of the poet with Horace in his lap rose before her and rebuked her. She was tempted to disclose her mission, dutifully, there and then.

"How is Mrs. Butters?" she inquired instead.

"About as well as common, which is to say, poorly—very poorly, thank you."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

Editor Butters seemed downcast.

"She's tried everything," he said. "Even had a pocket made in her gown to hold a potato and a horse-chestnut — but this rheumatism does beat all, I tell you. How's the old gentleman?"

"The doctor says he will never walk."

"Yes, so I heard," muttered the editor. "It's a damned shame."

He was fumbling with his proofs and did not see her face—yet, after all, she could feel the sympathy even in his rudeness.

"Still hatching poems, I suppose?"

Her heart, which had warmed even as her

cheeks had colored at his other words, grew cold at these. What manner of toil it was that brought forth things so pure and beautiful in her sight, what labor of love and travail of spirit it was to him, she alone would ever know who watched beside him, seeing his life thus ebbing, dream by dream. She sat silent, crumpling those precious pages in her hands.

"Well," Butters went on, gruffly, clearing his throat, "he's a good hand at it." He was not looking at Letitia, but kept his eyes upon a ring of keys with which he played nervously; and now when he spoke it was more spasmodically, as if reluctant to broach some matter for which, however, he felt the time had come. "Yes, he's a good hand at it. Used to be even better than he is now—but that's natural. I wish, though—you'd just suggest when it comes handy—just in a quiet sort of way, you know—some day when you get the chance—that he's getting just a leetle bit—you can say it better than I can—but I mean long-winded for the *Gazette*. It's natural, of course, but you see—you see, Miss Primrose, if we print one long-winded piece, you know—you can see for yourself—why, every other poet in Grassy Ford starts firing epics at

us, which is natural, of course, but—hard on me. And if I refuse 'em, why, then, they just naturally up and say, 'Well, you printed Primrose's; why not mine?' and there they have you—there they have you right by the—yes, sir, there they have you; and there's the devil to pay. Like as not they get mad then and stop their papers, which they don't pay for — and that's natural, too, only it causes feeling and doesn't do me any good, or your father either."

"But, Mr. Butters, you printed Mr. Banks's letter on carrots, and that was—"

The editor fairly leaped in his chair.

"There, you have it!" he cried. "Just what I said! There's that confounded letter of Jim Banks's, column-long on carrots, a-staring me in the face from now till kingdom come when any other idiot wants to print something a column long. Just what I say, Miss Primrose; but you must remember that the readers of the *Gazette* do raise carrots, and they *don't* raise—well, now, for instance, and not to be mean or personal at all, Miss Primrose—not at all—they *don't* raise Agamemnons or Theocrituses. I suppose I should say Theocriti—singular, Theocritus; plural, Theocriti. No, sir, they don't

raise Theocriti—which is natural, of course, and reminds me—while we are *on* the subject—reminds me, Miss Primrose, that I've been thinking—or wondering—in fact, I've been going to ask you for some time back, only I never just got the chance—ask you if you wouldn't—just kind of speak to your father, to kind of induce him, you know, to—to write on—about—well, about *livelier* things. You see, Miss Primrose, it's natural, of course, for scholars to write about things that are dead and gone. They wouldn't *be* scholars if they wrote what other people knew about. That's only natural. Still — still, Miss Primrose, if the old gentleman *could* just give us a poem or two on the—well, the issues of the day, you know—oh, he's a good writer, Miss Primrose! Mind, I'm not saying a word—not a word — against that. I'd be the last— Good God, what's the matter, girl! What have I done? Oh, I say now, that's too bad—that's too bad, girlie. Come, don't do that—don't—Why, if I'd a-known—"

Letitia, "Jerusalem" crushed in her right hand, had buried her face among the proof-sheets on his desk. Woolier than ever in his bewilderment, the editor rose—sat—rose again—

patted gingerly (he had never had a daughter), patted Letitia's shaking shoulders and strove to soothe her with the only words at his command: "Oh, now, I say—I—why, say, if I'd a-known"—till Letitia raised her dripping face.

"You m-mustn't mind, Mr. B-Butters," she said, smiling through her tears.

"Why, say, Miss Primrose, if I'd a-dreamed—"

"It's all my f-fault, Mr. B-Butters."

"Damn it, no! It's mine. It's mine, I tell you. I might a-known you'd think I was criticising your father."

"Oh, it's not that exactly, Mr. Butters, but you see—"

She put her hair out of her eyes and smoothed the manuscript.

"Egad! I see; you had one of the old gentleman's—"

Letitia nodded.

"Egad!" he cried again. "Let's see, Miss Primrose."

"Oh, there isn't the slightest use," she said. "It's too long, Mr. Butters."

"No, no. Let's have a look at it."

"No," she answered. "No, it's *altogether* too long, Mr. Butters."

"But let's have a look at it."

She hesitated. His hand was waiting; but she shook her head.

"No. It's the longest poem he ever wrote, Mr. Butters. It's his masterpiece."

"By George! let's see it, then. Let's see it."

"Why, it's as long, Mr. Butters—it's as long as 'Lycidas.'"

"Long as—hm!" he replied. "Still—still, Miss Primrose," he added, cheerfully, "that isn't so long when you come to think of it."

"But that's not all," Letitia said. "It's about—it's called—oh, you'll *never* print it, Mr. Butters!"

She rose with the poem in her hand.

"Print it!" cried Butters. "Why, of course I'll print it. I'll print it if every cussed poet in Grassy—"

"Oh, *will* you, Mr. Butters?"

"Will I? Of course I will."

He took it from her unresisting fingers.

"Je-ru-sa-lem!" he cried, fluttering the twenty pages.

"Yes," she said, "that's—that's the name of it, Mr. Butters," and straightway set herself to rights again.

IV

THE SEVENTH SLICE

IT was the editor himself who told me the story years afterwards—Butters of "The Pide Bull," as he ever afterwards called his shop, for in her gratitude Letitia had pointed out to him how natural it was that he of all men should be the patron of poets, since beyond a doubt, she averred, he was descended from that very Nathaniel Butter for whom was printed the first quarto edition of *King Lear*. Indeed, with the proofs of "Jerusalem" she brought him the doctor's Shakespeare, and showed him in the preface to the tragedy the record of an antique title-page bearing these very words:

> "Printed for *Nathaniel Butter*, and are to be ſold at his ſhop in *Paul's* Churchyard at the ſigne of the Pide Bull neere St. Auſtin's Gate, 1608."

"Egad!" said Butters, "I never heard that before. Well, well, well, well."

"I think there is no doubt, Mr. Butters," said Letitia, "that he was your ancestor."

"You don't say so," mumbled the delighted editor. "Shouldn't wonder. Shouldn't wonder now at all. I believe there was an 's' tacked on our name, some time or other, now that I come to think of it, and printer's ink always did run in the Butters blood, by George!"

He even meditated hanging up a sign with a pied bull upon it—or so he said—but rejected the plan as too Old English for Grassy Ford. He never ceased, however, to refer to "my old cousin — Shakespeare's publisher, you know," and in the occasional dramatic criticisms that embellished the columns of the *Gazette*, all plays presented at our Grand Opera-House in the Odd Fellow's Block were compared, somehow, willy-nilly, to *King Lear*.

Butters of "The Pide Bull," I say, first told me how that young Crusader with the tear-wet face had delivered "Jerusalem," saving it from the stern fate which had awaited it and setting it proudly among the immortal "Gems." Then I sought Letitia, whose briefer, more reluctant

version filled in wide chinks in the Butters narrative, while my knowledge of them both, of their modesty and their tender-heartedness, filled in the others, making the tale complete.

I was too young when the poet wrote his masterpiece to know or care about it, or how it found its way to the wondering world of Grassy Ford—nay, to the whole round world as well, "two hemispheres," as old man Butters used to remind me with offended pride in his voice, which had grown gruffer with his years. Did he not send *Gazettes* weekly, he would ask, to Mrs. Ann Bowers's eldest son, a Methodist missionary in the Congo wilds, and to "that woman in Asia"? He referred to a Grassy Ford belle of other days who had married a tea-merchant and lived in Chong-Chong.

Who knows what befell the edition of that memorable *Gazette* which contained "Jerusalem," set solid, a mighty column of Alexandrine lines? One summer's afternoon, tramping in an Adirondack wilderness, I came by chance upon the blackened ashes of a fire, and sitting meditatively upon a near-by log, poking the leaf-strewn earth with my stick, I unearthed a yellow, half-burned corner of an old newspaper, and, idly

lifting it to read, found it a fragment of some Australian *Times*. Still more recently, when my aunt Matilda, waxing wroth at the settling floors of her witch-colonial house in Bedfordtown, had them torn up to lay down new ones, the carpenters unearthed an old rat's nest built partially of a New York *Tribune* with despatches from the field of Gettysburg.

"Sneer not at the power of the press," old man Butters used to say, stuffing the bowl of his black pipe from my tobacco-jar and casting the match into my wife's card-tray. "Who knows, my boy? Davy Primrose's 'Jerusalem' may turn up yet."

It is something to ponder now how all those years that I played away, Letitia, of whom I thought then only as the young lady who lived next door and occasional confidante of my idle hours, was slaving with pretty hands and puzzling her fair young mind to bring both ends together in decent comfort for that poor dependent one. Yet she does not sigh, this gray Letitia among the petunias, when she talks of those by-gone days, but is always smiling back with me some happy memory.

"You were the funniest boy, Bertram," she

tells me, "always making believe that it was old England in Grassy Ford, and that you were Robin Hood or Lord Somebody or Earl Somebody Else. How father used to laugh at you! He said it was a pity you would never be knighted, and once he drew for you your escutcheon—you don't remember? Well, it had three books upon it—*Tom Brown's School-days, Tales of a Grandfather,* and the *Morte d'Arthur.*"

Then I remind her that Robin Saxeholm was half to blame for my early failure as an American. He was a Devonshire lad; he had been a Harrow boy, and was a Cambridge man when he came, one summer of my boyhood, to Grassy Ford to visit the Primroses. His father had been the doctor's dearest friend when they were boys together in Devonshire, and when young Robin's five-feet-eleven filled up the poet's doorway, Letitia tells me, the tears ran down the doctor's cheeks and he held out both his arms to him:

"Robin Saxeholm!—you young Devon oak, you—tell me, does the Dart still run?"

"*He* does, sir!" cried the young Englishman, speaking, Letitia says, quite in the Devon manner, for those who dwell upon the banks of that

famous river find, it seems, something too human in its temper and changeful moods to speak of it in the neuter way.

They sat an hour together, the poet and his old friend's son, before Letitia could show the guest to the room she had prepared for him.

That was a summer!

Robin taught me a kind of back-yard, two-old-cat cricket with a bat fashioned by his own big hands. Sometimes Letitia joined us, and the doctor watched us from his chair rolled out upon the garden walk, applauding each mighty play decorously, in the English fashion, with clapping hands. Robin Goodfellow, the doctor called our captain, "though a precious large one, I'll be bound," he said. Letitia called him Mr. Saxeholm, first—then Mr. Robin, and sometimes, laughingly, Mr. Bobbin—then Robin. I called him Mr. Bob.

I made up my mind to one thing then and there: I should be happier when I grew old enough to wear white cricket flannels and a white hat like Mr. Bob's, and I hoped, and prayed too on my knees, that *my* skin would be as clear and pinkish—yes, and my hair as red.

Alas! I had begun all wrong: I was a little beast of a brunette.

I taught Mr. Bob baseball, showed him each hill and dale, each whimpering brook of Grassy Ford, and fished with him among the lilies in shady pools while he smoked his pipe and told me of Cambridge and Harrow-on-the-Hill and the vales of Devon. He had lived once, so he told me, next door to a castle, though it did not resemble Warwick or Kenilworth in the least.

"It was just a *cah-sle*," said Mr. Bob, in his funny way.

"With a moat, Mr. Bob?"

"Oh yes, a moat, I dare say—but dry, you know."

"And a drawbridge, Mr. Bob?"

"Well, no—not precisely; at any rate, you couldn't draw it up."

"But a portcullis, I'll bet, Mr. Bob?"

"Well—I *cahn't* say as to that, I'm sure, Bertram."

He had lived next door to a castle, mind you, and did not know if it had a portcullis! He had never even looked to see! He had never even asked! Still, Mr. Bob was a languid fellow, Bertram Weatherby was bound to admit, even

in speech, and drawled out the oddest words sometimes, talking of "trams" and "guards" and "luggage-vans," which did seem queer in a college man, though Bertram remembered he was not a Senior and doubtless would improve his English in due time. Indeed, he helped him, according to his light, and the credit is the boy's that the young Britisher, after a single summer in Grassy Ford, could write from Cambridge to Letitia: "I guess I will never forget the folks in Grassy Ford! Remember me to the little kid, my quondam guide, philosopher, and friend."

Robin was always pleasant with Letitia, helping her with her housework, I remember, wiping her dishes for her, tending her fires, and weeding her kitchen-garden. There never had been so many holidays, she declared, gratefully, and she used to marvel that he had come so far, all that watery way from Devon, yet could be content with such poor fare and such humble work and quiet pleasures in an alien land so full of wonders. Yet it must have been cheerful loitering, for he stayed on, week after week. He had come intending, he confessed, to "stop" but one, but somehow had small hankering thereafter to see, he said, "what is left of America,

liking your Grassy Fordshire, Bertram, so very well." Perhaps secretly he was touched by the obvious penury and helplessness of his father's friend, as well as by the daughter's loving and heavy service, so that he stayed on but to aid them in the only unobtrusive way, overpaying them, Letitia says, for what he whimsically called "tuition in the quiet life," as he gently closed her fingers over the money which she blushed to take. Then he would quote for her those lines from Pope:

> ". . . Quiet by day,
> Sound sleep by night; study and ease
> Together mixt, sweet recreation,
> And innocence, which most doth please
> With meditation."

He read Greek and Latin with Dr. Primrose, and many an argument of ancient loves and wars I listened to, knowing by the keen-edged feeling of my teeth when the fray was over that my mouth had been wide open all the while. Letitia, too, could hear from the kitchen where she made her pies, for it was a conversational little house, just big enough for a tête-à-tête, as Dr. Primrose used to say, and when debate waxed high, she would stand sometimes in the kitchen

doorway, in her gingham apron, wiping the same cup twenty times.

"Young Devon oak," the doctor called him, sometimes half vexed to find how ribbed and knotty the young tree was.

"We'll look it up, then," he would cry, "but I know I'm right."

"You'll find you are mistaken, I think, doctor."

"Well, now, we'll see. We-'ll see. You're fresh from the schools and I'm a bit rusty, I'll confess, but I'm sure I'm—here, now—hm, let's see—why, can that be possible?—I didn't think so, but—by George! you're right. You're right, sir. You're right, my boy."

He said it so sadly sometimes and shut the book with an air so beaten, lying back feebly in his chair, that Robin, Letitia says, would lead the talk into other channels, merely to contend for ground he knew he could never hold, to let the doctor win. It was fine to see him then, the roused old gentleman, his eyes shining, sitting bolt upright in his chair waving away the young man's arguments with his feeble hand.

"I think you are right, doctor, after all. I see it now. You make it clear to me. Yes,

sir, I'm groggy. I'm down, sir. Count me out."

And you should have seen the poet then in his triumph, if victory so gracious may be called by such a name. There was no passing under the yoke—no, no! He would gaze far out of the open window, literally overlooking his vanquished foe, and delicately conveying thus a hint that it was of no utter consequence which had conquered; and so smoothing the young man's rout, he would fall to expatiating, soothingly, remarking how natural it was to go astray on a point so difficult, so many-sided, so subtle and profound—in short, speaking so eloquently for his prone antagonist, expounding so many likely arguments in defence of that lost cause, one listening would wonder sometimes who had won.

Evenings, when Letitia's work was done, she would come and sit with us, Robin and me, upon the steps. There in the summer moonlight we would listen to his tales, lore of the Dartmoor and Exmoor wilds, until my heart beat strangely at the shadows darkening my homeward way when the clock struck ten. Grape-vines, I noted then, were the very place for an ambush by the

Doones, of whom they talked so much, Robin and Letitia! Later, when the grapes were ripe, a Doone could regale himself, leisurely waiting to step out, giant-wise, upon his prey! There were innumerable suspicious rustlings as I passed, and in particular a certain strange—a dreadful *brushing* sound as of ghostly wings when I squeezed, helpless, through the worn pickets!—and then I would strike out manfully across the lawn.

One day in August—it was August, I know, for it was my birthday and Robin had given me a rod and line—we took Letitia with us to the top of Sun Dial, a bald-crowned hill from which you see all Grassy Fordshire green and golden at your feet. Leaving the village, we crossed a brook by a ford of stones and plunged at once into the wild wood, forest and ancient orchard that clothed the slope. I was leading—to show the way. Robin followed with Letitia—to help her over the rocks and brambles and steeper places of the long ascent, which was far more arduous than one might think, looking up at it from the town below.

I strode on proudly, threading the narrow hunter's trail I knew by heart, a remnant of an old wagon-lane long overgrown. I strode on

swiftly, I remember, breaking the cobwebs, parting the fragrant tangle that beset the way—vines below, branches above me—keeping in touch the while, vocally, when the thickets intervened, with the pair that followed. I could hear them laughing together over the green barriers which closed behind me, and I was pleased at their troubles among the briers. I had led them purposely by the roughest way. Robin, stalking across the ford, had made himself merry with my short legs, and I had vowed secretly that before the day was out he should feel how long those legs could be.

"I'll show you, Mr. Bob," I muttered, plunging through the brushwood, and setting so fast a pace it was no great while before I realized how faintly their voices came to me.

"Hello-o!" I cried.

"H'lo-o!" came back to me, but from so far behind me I deemed it wiser to stop awhile, awaiting their approach.

The day was glorious, but quiet for a boy. The world was nodding in its long, midsummer nap, and no birds sang, no squirrels chattered. I looked in vain for one; but there were berries and the mottled fruit of an antique ap-

ple-tree to while the time away — and so I waited.

I remember chuckling as I nibbled there, wondering what Mr. Bob would say of those short legs which had outstripped him. I fancied him coming up red and breathless to find me calmly eating and whistling between bites — and I did whistle when I thought them near enough. I whistled "Dixie" till I lost the pucker, thinking what fun it was, and tried again, but could not keep the tune for chuckling. And so I waited—and then I listened—but all the wood was still.

"Hello-o!" I cried.

There was no answer.

"Hello-o!" I called again, but still heard nothing in reply save my own echo.

"*Hello-o!*" I shouted. "*Hello-o!*" till the wood rang, and then they answered:

"H'lo-o!" but as faint and distant as before.

They had lost their way!

"*Wait!*" I shouted, plunging pell-mell through the bushes. "Wait where you are! I'm coming!"

And so, hallooing all the way, while Robin answered, I made my way to them—and found them resting on a wall.

"Hello," I said.

"Hello," said Robin. "We aren't mountain-goats, you know, Bertram."

I grinned gleefully.

"I thought my legs were so short?" I said.

"And so they are," he replied, calmly, "but you go a bit too fast, my lad—for Letty."

I had forgotten Letitia! Revenging myself on Robin, it was she alone who had suffered, and my heart smote me as I saw how pale she was, and weary, sitting beside him on the wall. Yet she did not chide me; she said nothing, but sat there resting, with her eyes upon the wild-flower which she plucked to pieces in her hand.

We climbed more slowly and together after that. I was chagrined and angry with myself, and a little jealous that Robin Saxeholm, friend of but a summer-time, should teach me thoughtfulness of dear Letitia. All that steep ascent I felt a strange resentment in my soul, not that Robin was so kind and mindful of her welfare, guiding her gently to where the slope was mildest, but that it was not I who helped her steps. I feigned indifference, but I knew each time he spoke to her and I saw how trustingly she gave her hand.

And I was envious—yes, I confess it—envious of Robin for himself, he was so stalwart; and besides, his coat and trousers set so rarely! They were of some rough, brownish, Scotchy stuff, and interwoven with a fine red stripe just faintly showing through—oh, wondrous fetching! Such ever since has been my ideal pattern, vaguely in mind when I enter tailor-shops, but I never find it. It was woven, I suppose, on some by-gone loom; perhaps at Thrums.

Reaching the summit and drinking in the sweet, clear, skyey airs, with Grassy Fordshire smiling from all its hills and vales for miles about us, I forgot my pique.

"What about water?" Letitia asked.

I knew a spring.

"I'll go," said Robin. "Where is it, Bertram?"

"Oh no, you won't!" I cried, fiercely. "That's my work, Mr. Bob. You're not the only one who can help Letitia."

He looked astonished for a moment, but laughed good-naturedly and handed me his flask. Letitia smiled at me, and I whistled "Dixie" as I disappeared. I hurried desperately till I lost my breath; I skinned both

knees; I wellnigh slipped from a rocky ledge, yet with all my haste I was a full half-hour gone, and got back red and panting.

They had waited patiently. Famished as they were, neither had touched a single mouthful. Letitia said, "Thank you, Bertram," and handed me a slice of the bread and jam. She seemed wondrous busy in our service. Robin was silent —and I guessed why.

"I didn't mean to be rough," I said.

"Rough?" he asked. "When were you rough, Bertie?"

"About the water."

"Oh," he said, putting his hand upon my shoulder. "I never thought of it, old fellow," and my heart smote me for the second time that day, seeing how much he loved me.

Letitia, weary with our hard climbing, ate so little that Robin chided her, very gently, and I tried banter.

"Wake up! This is a picnic." But they did not rally, so I sprang up restlessly, crying, "It's not like our other good times at all."

"What!" said Robin, striving to be playful. "Only *six* slices, Bertram? This is our last holiday. Eat another, lad."

Then I understood that gloom on Sun Dial: he was going to leave us. Boylike, I had taken it for granted, I suppose, that we would go on climbing and fishing and playing cricket in Grassy Ford indefinitely. He was to go, he said, on Monday.

"News from home, Mr. Bob?"

He was silent a moment.

"Well, no, Bertie."

"Then why not stay?" I urged. "Stay till September."

He shook his head.

"Eat one more slice for me," I can hear him drawling. "I'll cut it—and a jolly fat one it shall be, Bertram—and Letty here, she'll spread it for you." Here Mr. Bob began to cut—well-nigh a quarter of the loaf he made it. "Lots of the jam, Letty," he said to her. "And you'll eat it, Bertram—and we'll call it—we'll call it the Covenant of the Seventh Slice—never to forget each other. Eh? How's that?"

Now, I did not want the covenant at all, but he was so earnest; and besides, I was afraid Letitia might think that I refused the slice because of the tears she had dropped upon it, spreading the jam.

V

THE HANDMAIDEN

OBIN gone, I saw but little of Letitia, I was so busy, I suppose, with youth, and she with age. The poet's lamp had burned up bravely all that summer-time, its flame renewed by Robin's coming—or, rather, it was the brief return of his own young English manhood which he lived again in that fine, clean Devon lad. Robin gone, he felt more keenly how far he was from youth and Devonshire, what a long journey he had come to age and helplessness, and his feeble life burned dimmer than before.

Two or three years slipped by. The charm was gone which had drawn me daily through the hole in our picket-fence. Even the doctor's Rugby tales no longer held me, I knew them so by heart. When he began some old beginning,

my mind recited so much more glibly than his faltering tongue, I had leaped to the end before he reached the middle of his story. He was given now to wandering in his narratives, and while he droned there in his chair, my own mind wandered where it listed, or I played restlessly with my cap and tried hard not to yawn, longing to be out-of-doors again. Many a time has my conscience winced, remembering that eagerness to desert one who had been so kind to me, who had led my fancies into pure-aired ways and primrose paths—a little too English and hawthorn-scented, some may think, for a good American, but we meant no treason. He, before Robin, had given my mind an Old-World bent never to be altered. Only last evening, with Master Shallow and a certain well-known portly one of Windsor fame, I drank right merrily and ate a last year's pippin with a dish of caraways in an orchard of ancient Gloucestershire. Before me as I write there hangs a drawing of pretty Sally of the alley and the song. Between the poet and that other younger Devonshire lad, they wellnigh made me an English boy.

We heard from Robin—rather, Letitia did.

He never wrote to me, but sent me his love in Letitia's letters and a book from London, *Lorna Doone*, for the Christmas following his return. Letitia told me of him now and then. She knew when he left Cambridge and we sent him a present—or, rather, Letitia did—*Essays of Emerson*, which she bought with money that could be ill-spared, and she wrote an inscription in it, "From Grassy Fordshire, in memory of the Seventh Slice." She knew when he went back home to Devon, and then, soon afterwards, I believe, when he left England and went out to India. Now, she did not tell me that wonderful piece of news till it was old to her, which was strange, I thought. I remember my surprise. I had been wondering where Robin was and saying to her that he must be in London—perhaps in Parliament!—making his way upward in the world, for I never doubted that he would be an earl some day.

"Oh no," Letitia said, when I mentioned London. "He is in India."

"India! Mr. Bob in India?"

"Yes. He went—why, he went last autumn! Didn't you know?"

No, I did not know. Why, I asked, and as

reproachfully as I could make the question—why had she never told me?

She must have forgotten, she replied, penitent—there were so many things to remember.

True, I argued, but she ought at least to have charged her mind with what was to me such important news. Mr. Bob and I were dear, dear friends, I reminded her. He had gone to India, and I had not known!

She knew it, she said, humbly. She would never forgive herself. I did not go near her for days, I remember, and long afterwards her offence still rankled in my mind. Had she not spread that slice on Sun Dial, never to forget? When next I saw her I made a rebuking point of it, asking her if she had heard from Robin. She shook her head. Months passed and no letter came.

"We don't see you often any more, Bertram," her father said to me one day.

"No," I stammered. "I'm—"

"Busy studying, I suppose," he said.

"Yes, sir; and ball-games," I replied.

"How do you get on with your Latin?" he inquired, feebly.

"We're still in Virgil, sir."

"Ah," he said, but without a trace of the old vigor the classics had been wont to rouse in him. "That's good—won'erful writer—up—"

He was pointing with his bony forefinger.

"Yes?" I answered, wondering what he meant to say. He roused himself, and pointed again over my shoulder.

"Up there—on the—s'elf."

He was so ghastly white I thought him dying and called Letitia.

"'S all right, Bertram," he reassured me, patting my hand. I suppose he had seen the terror in my face. He smiled faintly. "'M all right, Bertram."

Outside the apple-trees were blooming, I remember, and he lived, somehow, to see them bloom again.

My conscience winces, as I say, to think how I twirled my cap by my old friend's bedside, longing to be gone; yet I comfort myself with the hope that he did not note my eagerness, or that if he did he remembered his own boyhood and the witchery of bat and ball. Not only was the poet's life-lamp waning, not only was Letitia burdened with increasing cares, fast aging her, the mater said, but I was a child no

longer; a youth, now, mindful of all about me, and seeing that neighbor household with new and comprehending eyes.

The very house grew dismal to me. The boughs outside were creeping closer — not to shelter it, not to cool it and make a breathing nook for a lad flushed with his games in the summer sun. It was damp there; the air seemed mouldy under the lindens; there was no invitation in the unkempt grass; toads hopped from beneath your feet, bird-songs came to you, but always, or so it seemed to me, they came from distance, from the yards beyond.

There within, across that foot-worn threshold which had been a goal for me in former years, there was now a — not a poet any longer, or Rugby boy, but only a sick old man. Upon a table at his side his goblets stood, covered with saucers, and a spoon in each. His drugs were watery; there was no warmth in them, no sparkle even when the sun came straggling in, no wine of life to be quaffed thirstily—only a tepid, hourly spoonful to be feebly sipped, a sop to death.

Even with windows open to the breeze the air seemed stifling to the lad I was. The sunlight

falling on the faded carpet seemed always ebbing to a kind of shadow of a glow. The clock, that ugly box upon the shelf, ticked dreadfully as if it never would strike a smiling hour again. The china ornaments at its side stood ghastly mute, and hideous flowers — *ffff!* those waxen faces under glass! If not quite dead, why were they kept so long a-dying there? Would no kind, sunny soul in mercy free them from their pallid misery? I was a Prince of Youth! What had I to do with tombs? I fled.

Even Letitia, kind as ever to me, seemed always busy and preoccupied—sweeping, dusting, baking, cleansing those everlasting pots and pans, or reading to her father, who listened dreamily, dozing often, but always waking if she stopped. Content to have her at his side because discontent to have her absent, even for the little while her duties or the doctor's orders led her, though quite unwillingly, away. Impatience for her return would make him querulous, which caused her tears, not for its failing consciousness of her devotion, but for its warning to her of his gentle spirit's slow decline despite her care.

"Where have you been so long, Letitia?"

"So long, father? Only an hour gone."

"Only an hour? I thought you would never come."

"See, father, I've brought you a softer pillow," she would say, smiling his plaints into oblivion. It was the smile with which she had caught the grape-thief by the fence, the one with which she had charmed a Devonshire lad, now gone three years and more—the tenderest smile I ever saw, save one, and the saddest, though not mournful, it was so genuine, so gentle, and so unselfish, and her eyes shone lovingly the while. Its sadness, as I think now of it, lay not so much in the smile itself as in the wonder of it that she smiled at all.

The mater—was she not always mother to the motherless?—was Letitia's angel in those weary days, carried fresh loaves of good brown bread to her, a pot of beans, or a pie, perhaps, passing with them through the hole in the picket-fence. I can see her now standing on Letitia's kitchen doorstep with the swathed dish in her hands.

"The good fairy," Letitia called her; and when she was for crying—for cry she must sometimes, though not for the world before her fa-

ther's eyes—she shed her tears in the kitchen in the mater's arms. So it was that while I was yet a school-boy an elder sister was born unto our house and became forever one of the Weatherbys by a tie—not of blood, I have said before, yet it was of blood, now that I come to think of it—it was of gentle, gentle human blood.

There was an old nurse now to share Letitia's vigils, but only the daughter's tender hands knew how to please. She scarcely left him. Doctor or friends met the same answer, smiling but unalterable: she would rather stay. Not a night passed that she did not waken of her own anxiety to slip softly to his bedside. He smiled her welcome, and she sat beside him with his poor, thin hand in hers, sometimes till the dawn of day.

Day by day like that, all through the silent watches of the darkened world, that gentle handmaiden laid her sacrifice upon the altar of her duty, without a murmur, without one bitter word. It was her youth she laid there; it was her girlhood and her bloom of womanhood, her first, her very last young years—sparkle of eyes, rose and fulness of maiden cheeks, the golden moments of that flower-time when Love goes

choosing, playtime's silvery laughter and blithe, untrammelled song.

"'Titia," he said to her, "there's no poem—'alf so beaut'ful—'s your love, m' dear."

The words were a crown to her. He set it on her bowed head with his trembling fingers.

"Soft—brown 'air," he murmured. He could not see how the gray was coming there.

Spring came, scenting his room with apple blooms; summer, filling it with orient airs—but he was gone.

VI

COUSIN DOVE

UP in the attic of the Primrose house one day, I was helping Letitia with those family treasures which were too antiquated for future usage, but far too precious with memories to cast out utterly—discarded laces, broken fans, pencilled school-books, dolls and toys that had been Letitia's, the very cradle in which she had been rocked by the mother she could not remember, even the little home-made pieced and quilted coverlet they had tucked about her while she slept. She folded it, and I laid it carefully in a wooden box.

"How shall we fill it?" I asked her, gazing at the odds and ends about my feet.

"With these," she said, bringing me packages of old newspapers, each bundle tied neatly with a red ribbon, too new and bright ever to have

been worn. I glanced carelessly at the foolish packages, as I thought them—then suddenly with a new interest.

"Why," I said, "they're papers from Bombay!"

"Yes," she answered.

"Where Robin is?" I asked.

There was no reply from the garret gloom.

"Did Mr. Bob send them?"

She was busy in a chest.

"What did you ask, Bertram?" she inquired, absently.

"Did Mr. Bob send these Bombay papers?"

"Oh," she answered, "those?"

She paused a moment.

"No," she told me.

"Oh," said I, much disappointed, "I thought he might. They're last year's papers, too, some of them."

"Do they fill the box?" she asked.

"Yes," I said. "Shall I nail the cover on?"

"Oh, don't *nail* it," she protested, shuddering. "We won't put any cover on, I think; at least—not yet."

Long before Dr. Primrose died he had planned with Letitia what she should do without him.

His home then would be hers, and she was to sell it and become a school-mistress, the one vocation for which his classical companionship had seemed to fit her and to which her own book-loving mind inclined. Left alone then she tried vainly to dispose of her little property, living meanwhile with us next door to it, and gradually, chiefly with my own assistance and the mater's, packing and storing the few possessions from which she could not bring herself to part. To Editor Butters she presented an old edition of *King Lear;* to me, not one, but many of her father's best-loved books, which she fancied might be of charm and use to me.

Of relatives across the sea Letitia knew little beyond a few strange names she had heard her father speak, and in her native and his adopted land she had no kinsfolk she had ever seen save a distant cousin as far removed from her in miles as blood, and remembered chiefly as a marvellously brocaded waistcoat with pearl buttons, to which she had raised her timorous eyes on his only visit to her father years ago. Apparently, this little girl had gone no farther up. She could never remember a face above that saffron vest, and, what was still more remarkable, considering

her shyness, was never certain even of the knees and boots that must have been somewhere below.

Now the yellow waistcoat, whose name was George—Cousin George McLean—had a daughter Dove, or Cousin Dove, as Letitia called her, concerning whom we always used to smile and wonder, so that in course of time myths had grown up about the girl whom none of us had ever seen and of whom we had no notions save the idle fancies suggested by her odd, sweet, unforgettable little name.

The mater had always said that she must be a quaint and demure little thing—in short, dove-like.

That, my father argued, was quite unlikely, since he had never known a child to mature in keeping with a foolish, flowery, or pious Christian name. He had never known a human Lily to grow up tall and pale and slender, or a Violet to be shy and modest and petite, or a Faith or Hope or Patience to be singularly spiritual and mild. For example, there was Charity B——, of Grassy Ford, who hinted that heaven was Presbyterian, and that she knew folks, not a thousand miles off, either, who would never be—Presbyterians, my father said; and so, he added,

it was dollars to dough-nuts that Cousin Dove was not at all dovelike, but a freckled and red-haired, roistering, tomboy little thing.

Letitia had a notion, she scarce knew how or why, that Cousin Dove was not birdlike, but like a flower, she said — a white-and-pink-cheeked British type with fluffy yellow hair and a fondness for candy, trinkets, and even boys.

As for myself, I had two notions as a boy—one for the forum, the other for my cell. The first was simply that Cousin Dove was pale and tall and frigid beyond endurance. I could see her, I declared, going to church somewhere with two little black-and-gilt books held limply in her hand —and she had green eyes, I said. On the other hand, privately, I kept a far different portrait in mind—a gilded one, rather a golden vision by way of analogy, I suppose, for was not Dove the veritable daughter of a gorgeous, saffron-hued brocade? From yellow waistcoat to cloth of gold is but a step for a bookish boy. She was tall and stately, I told myself; and as I saw her then, her mediæval robe clung lovingly about her, plain but edged with pearls (seed-pearls I think they called them in the old romances),

and she had a necklace of larger pearls, loops of them hanging a golden cross upon her bosom. Her face was radiant, her eyes blue, her hair golden, and she wore a coronal of meadow flowers. I do not mean that I really fancied Cousin Dove was so in flesh and blood, but such to me was the spirit of her gentle name, the spell of which had conjured up for me in some rare moment of youthful fancy this Lady of the Marigolds, this Christmas-card St. Dove.

In the midst of Letitia's sad uprooting of her old garden, as she called the only home she had ever known, a letter came from the yellow waistcoat conveying surprising news. Dove herself was leaving for Grassy Ford to persuade her cousin to return with her and dwell henceforth with the McLeans. A thrill ran through our little household at the thought of that approaching maid of dreams. Now we should know, the mater said, that the girl was dovelike. "Humpf!" was my father's comment. Letitia trembled, she said, with a return of her childish awe of the yellow waistcoat. I myself was stirred—I was still in teens, and dreaded girls I had never met.

On the July morning that was to bring her, I

rose early, I remember, and took down my fishing-rod.

"Not a bad idea, either," remarked my father, as he stood watching me. "Still," he added, "there's no hurry, Bertram. She'll want to change her dress first, you know."

I made no answer.

"It's a bit selfish though," he continued, "to be carrying her off this way the very first morning."

"Mother," I said, coolly, "will you put up some sandwiches? I may not be back till dark."

"Why, Bertram! Going fishing on the day—"

"I don't really see what that's got to do with it," I interrupted. "Must I give up all my fun because a mere girl's coming?"

"No, Bertram," said my father, in his kindest tones. "Go, by all means, and here [he was rummaging in the bookcase drawer]—here, my son, take these along, these old field-glasses. They may come handy. You can see our yard, you know, from the top of Sun Dial—and the front porch. Splendid fishing up on Sun Dial—"

But I was off.

"Bertram! Bertram!" called my mother, but

I did not heed her. I stopped at a grocery for cheese and crackers, and strode off to the farthest brook—farthest, I mean, from Sun Dial. Troublesome Brook, it was called, not so much for the spring freshets that spread it over the lower meadows as for the law-suits it had flowed through in its fickle course between two townships and good farm-lands. Under its willows I cooled my wrath and disentangled my knotted tackle. The stream flowed silently. There was no wind, no sound, indeed, but the drone of insects; all about me was a world in reverie, midsummer-green save for the white and blue above and the yellow wings of vagrant butterflies and the sun golden on the meadows. Many a time I have fished in that very spot. It is a likely one for idleness and for larger fish than any I ever caught there, and waiting for them as a boy I used to read in the little pocket-fitting books I dote on to this day—they fit the hand so warmly, unlike their bigger brethren, who at the most give you three-fingers' courtesy. There on that same moist bank I have sounded deeper pools than Troublesome's, and have come home laden with unlooked-for spoil that glistens still in a certain time-worn upper creel of mine.

But I had no book that day, having forgotten one in my hurried parting, and I had not yet mastered that other tranquil art of packing little bowls with minced brown meditation—so I was restless. The world seemed but half awake. I chafed at the stillness. Before, I had found it pleasant; now it nettled me. I frowned impatiently at my cork dozing on the waters. I roused it savagely, and gazed up at the sun.

"Queer," I said to myself. "Queer it should be so late this morning"—but I did not mean the sun.

Trains from the West glide into Grassy Ford on a long curve following the trend of Troublesome and the pastoral valley through which it runs. It is a descending grade down which the cars plunge roaring as though they had gathered speed rather than slackened it, and as though they would run the gantlet of the ugly buildings and red freight-cars that, from the windows of the train, are all one sees of our lovely town. Now the Black Arrow was the pride of the X., Y. & Z., and all that summer had arrived in the nick of its schedule time.

"Funny," said I to myself, looking at the sun. "Funny it should be late this morning."

I pulled up my hook and cast it in again. My cork shook itself—yawned, I was about to say, and settled down again as complacently as before. Leisurely the ripples widened and were effaced among the shadows.

What right had any one to assume that I had not long planned to go a-fishing that very morning?

I pulled up my line again.

Even a father should not presume on the kinship of his son.

I dropped my bait into a likelier hole.

Besides, I was not a child any longer, to be bullyragged by older people. Had I not gone fishing a hundred times?—yet no one had ever deemed it odd before.

My float drifted against a snag. I jerked it back.

It was the only unpleasant trait my father had.

Again I squinted at the sun. "Queer," said I, "it should be so late this morning." I pulled up my—

Hark! *That* was a whistle! There would be just time to reach the open if I ran!

I ran.

Breathless, I made the meadow fence and clambered up—and saw her train go by. Yes, I—I waved to it. Suppose she had seen me! I was only some truant farm-boy on a rail.

Her train ran by me in a cloud of dust and clattered on among the freight-cars. I heard the rumble die away, but the bell kept ringing. The brakeman, doubtless, would help her off—Letitia would be waiting with out-stretched arms—girls are such fools for kissing—and then father would take her bag, and the surrey would whisk her off to the mater, bareheaded at the gate. Rails are sharp sitting; let us look at the cork again.

It was calm as ever and nestling against a snag. I pulled up my line till the bait emerged, limp, unnibbled. Savagely I swished it back—it caught in the willows. I pulled. It would not budge. In a sudden rage I whipped out my pocket-knife, severed the cord as high above me as I could reach, and wrapping the remnant about my rod, turned townward.

A dozen yards from the faithless stream, I remembered my cheese and crackers, and went back for them, and started off again, purposeless. Never before had vagabondage on a golden

morning seemed irksome to me. It was not that I wished to see Cousin Dove, but merely that I had no desire to do anything else—a different matter. Only one way was really barred to me, since in point of pride I could not go homeward till the sun sank, yet all other ways seemed shorn somehow of their old delights, I knew so well every stick and stone of them.

While I was dallying thus, irresolute, I thought of "The Pide Bull" and my old friend Butters. It was inspiration. In twenty minutes (mindful of my father's eyes meanwhile) I had reached the shop.

"Hello," he growled, as I appeared. "You here again?"

"Yep."

"What do you want?"

"Nothing."

"Humpf! Help yourself, then."

"Mr. Butters, what kind of type is this?"

"What type?"

"This type."

"What good 'll it do to tell you? You won't remember it, if I do."

"Yes, I will."

"You won't know ten minutes after I tell you."

"Go on, Mr. Butters. Tell me."

"Well, if you must know, it's b'geois."

"B-what?"

"B'geois, I tell you, and I won't tell you again, either."

"How do you spell it, Mr. Butters?"

"Say, what do you think I am? I haven't got time to sit here all day and answer questions."

"But how do you spell it, Mr. Butters?"

"Dictionary 's handy, isn't it?"

"You ought to know how to spell it," I remarked, fluttering the dictionary.

"Who said I didn't know how to spell it?"

"You told me to look it up."

"Did, hey? And what d' I do it for? D' you think I've got time to be talking to every young sprig like you?"

"Here it is, Mr. Butters. It's spelled b-o-u-r-g-e-o-i-s."

"Precisely," said the editor—"b-o-u-r-g-o-i-s, bur-joyce."

"No—g-*e*-o-i-s, Mr. Butters."

"Just what I said."

"You left out the 'e.'"

"Why, confound you, what do you mean by telling me I don't know my own business?"

"I was only fooling, Mr. Butters. You did say the 'e,' of course."

"You're a liar!" he promptly answered. "I didn't say the 'e,' and you know it!"

He broke off into a roar of triumphant laughter, but well I knew who had won the day. He was mine—he and "The Pide Bull," and the story of his wife's uncle's old yellow rooster, and the twenty legends of Tommy Rice, the sexton, who "stuttered in his walk, by George!"—yes, and the famous narrative of how Mr. Butters thrashed the barkeep—all, all his darling memories were mine till sunset if I chose to listen.

He took me to luncheon at the Palace Hotel near by his shop, and afterwards mellowed perceptibly over his pipe, as we sat together in the clutter of paper about his desk waiting for the one-o'clock whistle to blow him to work again.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Eighteen," said I, half ashamed I was no more.

"Beautiful age," he mused, nodding his head and stroking his warm black bowl. "Beautiful age, my boy." He spoke so mildly that I waited,

silent and a little awed to have come so near him unawares, and feeling the presence of some story he had never told before.

But the whistle blew one o'clock and he rose and put on his apron, and went back to his case again, talking some nonsense about the weather; and though I lingered all afternoon, he was nothing but the old, gruff printer, and never afterwards did I catch him nooning and thinking of the age he said was beautiful.

It was six when I took up my fishing-tackle and went home to supper, whistling. I found the mater in the kitchen.

"Ah," she said. "What luck, Bertram?"

"None," I replied. "The fish weren't biting."

"*Oh*, that's too bad. You must be tired."

"I am, and hungry. Is father home?"

"Not yet. Come, you must meet—"

But I ran up the kitchen staircase to the hall above. Safe in my room, I could hear a murmuring from Letitia's. Hers was a front room, mine a rear one, and a long hall intervened, so I made nothing of the voices.

I scrubbed and lathered till my nose was red and shining beautifully. Then I drew on my Sunday suit, in which I always stood the straight-

er, and my best black shoes, in which I always stamped the louder, and my highest, whitest collar, and my best light silk cravat—a Christmas present from Letitia, a wondrous thing of pale, sweet lavender, in which not Solomon—though it *would* hike up behind. It was not like other ties, and while I was struggling there I heard the supper knell. I pulled fiercely. The soft silk crumpled taut—and the bow stuck up seven ways for Sunday. So I unravelled it again—looped it once more with trembling fingers, for I heard the voices on the stairs, and jerked it into place—but what a jumble!

"Bertram! Bertram!" It was father's voice. "Supper, Bertram."

"In a minute."

The face in the glass was red as a sunset in harvest-time. The eyes I saw there popped wildly.

"Bertram!"

"Yes; I hear you! [Confound it.]"

"Supper, Bertram. We are all waiting."

I deigned no answer.

Then father rang. Oh, I knew it was father. I looped desperately and hauled again like a sailor at his cordage, and so, muttering, wrung

out a bow-knot. Then in the mirror I took a last despairing look, leaped for the doorway, slipped, stumbled, and almost fell upon the stairs, hearing below me a lusty warning—"Here he comes!"—and so emerged, rosy, a youth-illumined, with something lavender, they tell me, fluttering in my teeth (and something blood-red, I could tell them, trembling in my heart).

And there she was!

There she stood in the smiling midst of them, smiling herself and giving me her hand—Cousin Dove—Cousin Dove McLean, at the first sight of whom my shyness vanished.

"Your tie, my son, seems a trifle—"

So *this* was Cousin Dove?—this was the daughter of the golden waistcoat—this brown-eyed school-girl with brown—no, as I lived!—red hair.

VII

OF HAMADRYADS AND THEIR SPELLS

IT was a golden summer that last of my youth at home, with Cousin Dove to keep us forever smiling. She was just eighteen and of that blessed temperament which loves each day for its gray or its sunny self. She coaxed Letitia out-of-doors where they walked much in the mater's garden with their arms about each other's waist. Letitia's pace was always deliberate, while Dove had the manner of a child restrained, as if some blithe and skipping step would have been more pleasant, would have matched better her restless buoyancy, her ever upturned beaming face as she confided in the elder woman—what? What do girls talk so long about? I used to marvel at them, wondering what Dove could find so merry among our currant-vines. She was a child beside Le-

titia. She had no memories to modulate that laughing voice of hers, no tears to quench the twin flames dancing in her eyes, and never an anxious thought in those days to cast its shadow there where her hair—red, I first called it; it was pure chestnut—brown, I mean, with the red just showing through, and wondrous soft and pretty on the margin of her fair white forehead, where it clung like tendrils of young scampering vine reddening in the April sun. Even Letitia, whose Present seemed always twilit, was tempted by-and-by into claiming something of that heritage of youth of which she had been so long deprived. From mere smiling upon her gay young cousin she fell to making little joyous venturings herself into our frolics, repartees, and harmless badinage —"midsummer madness," father called it — a sort of scarlet rash, he said, which affected persons loitering on starlit evenings on the porch or wandering under trees. He was the soul of our table banter, and after supper sat with us on the steps smoking his cigar and "devilling," as he said, "you younger caps and bells." Whom he loved he teased, after the fashion of older men, and Dove was the chief butt of that rude fondness. It was not his habit

to caress, but his eyes twinkled at his fair victim.

"And to think, Dove," he was wont to say when she had charmed him, "that Bertram here swore that you carried prayer-books and had green eyes!"

"And what did you prophesy, Uncle Weatherby?"

"I? The truth."

"And what was that?"

"Why, *I* said you were an angel, though a little frolicsome perhaps, and with beautiful auburn hair. Did I not, my son?"

"No, sir. You thought she would be a tomboy with red—"

"Precisely," he would interrupt. "You see, my dear, how in every particular I am corroborated by my son."

Into these quiet family tournaments, Letitia, as I have said, was slowly drawn, but it was a new world to her and she was timid in it. Doctor Primrose had been endowed with wit, even with a quiet, subtle humor in which his daughter shared, but beneath their lighter moments there had flowed always an undercurrent of that sad gravity which tinged their lives together. If

they were playful in each other's company, it was out of pity for each other's lot, his in his chair, hers by its side, rather than because they could not help the jest. It was meant to cheer each other—that kind of tender gayety which, however fanciful, however smiling, ends where it begins—in tears unshed. Waters in silent woodland fountains, all untouched by a single gleam from the sky above the boughs, lose sometimes their darker hues and turn to amber beneath the fallen leaves—but they are never golden like the meadow pools; they never flash and sparkle in the sun.

Letitia was not yet thirty; life stretched years before her yet; so, coaxed by Cousin Dove and me, she gave her hands to us, half-delighted, half-afraid. Here now, at last, were holidays, games, tricks, revels, the mummery and masque, the pipe and tabor—all the rosy carnival of youth. Her eyes kindled, her heart beat faster as we led her on—but at the first romp failed her. It was beautiful, she pleaded—only let her smile upon it as from a balcony—she could not dance—she had never learned our songs.

We did not urge her. She sat with the mater and smiled gladly upon our mirth. In all the

frolics of that happy summer her eyes were always on Cousin Dove, as if, watching, she were thinking to herself — enviously, often sadly, I have no doubt, but through it all lovingly and with a kind of pride in that grace and flowerness—

"There is the girl I might have been."

Dove, even when she seemed the very spirit of our effervescence, kept always a certain letter of that lovely quaintness which her name implied. She *was* a dove, the mater said, reminding us for the hundredth time of her old prediction — a dove always, even among the magpies; meaning, I suppose, father and myself.

It was not all play that summer. I was to enter college in the fall, and I labored at exercises, helped not a little by a voice still saying:

"That's right, my boy. Remember what Dr. Primrose said when he gave you Horace."

Now was I under the spell of that ancient life which had held him thralled to his very end. Mine were but meagre vistas, it is true, but I caught such glimpses of marble beauty through the pergola of Time, as made me a little proud of my far-sightedness. Seated with Dove and Letitia beneath a favorite oak, half-way up Sun

Dial, I discoursed learnedly, as I supposed, only to find that in classic lore the poet's daughter was better versed than I. She brightened visibly at the sound of ancient names; they had been the music of her father's world, and from earliest childhood she had listened to it. Seated upon the grass, I, the school-boy, expounded text-book notes. She, the daughter of "Old David Homer," as Butters called him, told us bright tales of gods and heroes, nymphs and flowers and the sailing clouds shell-pink in the setting sun. They had been to her what *Mother Goose* and *Robinson Crusoe* had been to me; they had been her fairy stories, told her at eve ere she went to bed; and now as she told them, an eager winsomeness crept upon her, her voice was sweeter, her face was glorified with something of that roseate light in which her scenes were laid; she was a child again, and Dove and I, listening, were children with her, asking more.

She sat bolt-upright while she romanced for us. I lay prone before her with my chin upon my hands, nibbling grass-stalks. Dove, like Letitia, sat upon the turf, now gazing raptly with her round brown eyes at the story-teller's face, now gazing off at the purple woodland

distance or at Grassy Ford's white spires among the elms below.

"Why, Letty, you're a poetess," Dove once said, so breathlessly that Letitia laughed. "And I," Dove added, "why, I don't know a single story."

"Why should you know one?" replied Letitia, pinching Dove's rueful face. "Why tell an idyl, when you can live one, little Chloe, little wild olive? You yourself shall be a heroine, my dear."

Idling there under distant trees for refuge from the August sun, which burns and browns our Grassy Fordshire, crumbling our roads to a gray powder and veiling with it the green of way-side hedge and vine—idling there, Dove was a creature I had never seen before and but half-divined in visions new to me. Fair as she seemed under our roof-tree, there in the woodland she was far the lovelier. Young things flowered about us, their fragrance scenting the summer air. Like them her presence wore a no less subtle spell. It was an ancient glamour, though I did not know it then, it seemed so new to me—one which young shepherds felt, wondering at it, in the world's morning; and since earth's daugh-

ters, then as now, with all their fairness, could scarce be credited with such wondrous witchery, those young swains came home breathless from the woodland with tales of dryads and their spells. Maiden mine, in the market-place, you are only one among many women, though you be beautiful as a dream, but under boughs the birds still sing those songs the first birds sang—there it is always Eden, and thou art the only woman there.

On my nineteenth birthday three climbed Sun Dial as three had climbed it once before. Leaving the village we crossed the brook by that self-same ford of stones, and plunged at once into the forest and ancient orchard that clothed the slope. I was not leading now, but helping them, Dove and Letitia, over the rocks and brambles and steeper places of the ascent. Threading as before that narrow trail I knew by heart, I broke the cob-webs and parted the fragrant tangle that beset our way, vines below, branches above us. It was just such another August noon, and the world was nodding; no birds sang, no squirrels chattered. We stopped for breath, resting upon a wall shaded by an ancient oak.

"The very spot!" I cried. "Do you remember, Letitia, how you and Robin rested here?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Do you remember how I called to you, and came running back?"

"Yes."

"I'd been waiting for you under an apple-tree. How I should like to see old Robin now!"

"Who was Robin?" asked Cousin Dove, and so I told her of the Devonshire lad. During my story Letitia wandered, as she liked to do, searching for odd, half-hidden flowers among the grasses. Soon she was nowhere to be seen, nor could we hear her near us.

"Letitia was fond of Robin, was she not?" asked Cousin Dove.

"Oh yes," I said. "So were we all."

"But I mean—don't you think she may have loved him?"

"Oh," I said, "I never thought of that; besides, Letitia never had time for—"

Dove opened wide her eyes.

"Must you have time for—"

"I mean," I stammered, "she was never free like—you or me; we—"

"I see," she replied, coloring. "He must have been a splendid fellow."

"He was," I said.

"Dear Letitia!" murmured Cousin Dove, gazing thoughtfully at the wilted flower she held. The wood which had been musical with voices was strangely silent now. It was something more than a mere stillness. It was like a spell, for I could not break it, though I tried. Dove, too, was helpless. There was no wind—I should have known had one been blowing—yet the boughs parted above her head, and a crown fell shining on her hair!—her hair, those straying tendrils of it, warm and ruddy and now fired golden at that magic touch—her brow, pure as a nun's, beneath that veiling—the long, curved lashes of her hidden eyes—her cheeks still flushed—her lips red-ripe and waiting motionless.

She raised her eyes to me!—a moment only, but my heart leaped, for in that instant it dawned upon me how all that vision there—flesh, blood, and soul—was just arm's-length from me!

It was—I know.

PART II

The School-Mistress

I

THE OLDER LETITIA

PRECISELY at half-past seven there was a faint rustling on our staircase and a moment later Letitia Primrose appeared at our breakfast-table smiling "Good-morning." She was dressed invariably in the plainest of black gowns with the whitest of ruching about her wrists and throat, and at the collar a pin which had been her mother's, a cameo Minerva in an antique setting of vine leaves wrought in gold. The gown itself—I scarcely know how to style it, for no frill or foible of the day was ever visible in its homely contour, or if existing there, had been so curbed by the wearer's modesty as to be quite null and void to the naked eye. Every tress of her early whitening hair lay smoothly back about her forehead, and behind was caught so neatly beneath her comb, it might

be doubted how or if she ever slept upon it. Just so immaculate, virginal, irreproachable did the older Letitia come softly down to us every week-day morning of her life, and taking her chair between Dove's seat and mine, she would adjust her gold-rimmed glasses to better see how the night had dealt with us, and beaming upon us with one of the pleasantest of inquiring smiles, would murmur—

"Well?"

She ate little, and that so unobtrusively, I used to wonder if she ate at all. I can remember her lifting her cup, but do not recall that it ever reached her lips. She had, I think, some trick of magnetism, some power of the eye that held yours at the crucial moment, so that you never really saw her sip or bite, and she never chewed, I swear, yet I never heard of her bad digestion. Eating in her was a chaste indulgence common only, I believe, to spinsterhood—a rite, communionlike, rather than a feast.

When the clock struck eight, we would rise together — I for my office, Dove for farewells, Letitia for the school-room; I with a clattering chair, Dove demurely, Letitia noiselessly, to put on a hat as vague and unassuming as that

decorous garment in which she cloaked herself from the outer world—a kind of cape and jacket, I think it was, in winter, but am not quite sure. In summer it was a cashmere shawl. Then slipping on a pair of gloves, black always and always whole, however faded, she would take up her small pearl-handled parasol, storm or shine, and that linen bag of hers, a marvellous reticule for books and manuscripts with a separate pocket in the cover-flap for a comb and mirror and extra handkerchief — though not to my knowledge; I am merely telling what was told. Nor am I telling all that was said of Letitia's panoply and raiment, the manner of which at every season, at every hour of the night and day, was characterized — if I have understood the matter—not so much by a charm of style as of precaution, a modest providence, a truly exquisite foresight and readiness for all emergencies, however perilous, so that fire nor flood nor war's alarms nor death itself, however sudden, should find her unprepared. Fire at night would merely have illumined a slender, unobtrusive figure descending a stair or ladder unabashed, decently, even gracefully arrayed in a silk kimono which hung nightly on the foot-board of her

bed; and since for other purposes it was never worn, it remains unscorched, and, indeed, unblemished, to this very day. But for that grim hand the moment of whose clutch can never be foretold with certainty, nothing could exceed Letitia's watchfulness and care. She dressed invariably, I have said, in the plainest black, but I have heard, and on authority I could not question, that however simple and inexpensive those outer garments were, the inner vestments were of finest linen superimposing the softest silk. Thus—for a tendency to some heart-affection was hereditary in the Primrose family — thus could no sudden dissolution or surrender, such as might occur in an absence from home and the ministration of loving friends, be attended ever by any *post-mortem* embarrassment or chagrin, but rather would disclose a pride and delicacy of taste and consideration, the more remarkable and worthy of approval and regret, because it could never otherwise have been revealed. Nothing I know of in the way of gifts was more acceptable to Letitia Primrose than those black silk ones which she took such pains to purchase and secrete.

It was a wondrous reticule, that linen pouch

of which I spoke, bearing "L. P." embroidered on its outer side. I say its outer, for so she carried it always; and in years, so many I will not count them, I never knew that monogram turned in, or down. She met me with it in the doorway from which Dove watched us till we had left the gate. Mornings, for years, we went to our work together, save when an urgent matter summoned me earlier or compelled me, against my will and exercise, to drive. Morn after morn we walked together to the red brick school-house, talking of village news and the varying moods of our fickle northern weather, or perhaps of books, old ones and new ones, or of those golden memories that we shared. They were not perfunctory as I recall them, those morning dialogues. There was no abstraction about Letitia, no cursory, unweighed chattering of things so obvious as to need no comment. Every topic might be a theme for her mild eloquence. It might be of Keats that she discoursed to me, or Browning or Alfred Tennyson or perhaps the Corsican, whom she hated, partly for tyranny, partly because he made her "look at him," she said; it might be the Early Church, whose records she had read and read again,

though not one-half so much for Cuthbert's holiness, I told her, as for Fuller's quaintness, which she loved; or it might be a March morning that we walked together, while she spoke like a poet's daughter of the first pink arbutus some grinning farm-boy had laid but yesterday upon her desk.

Why no one ever wooed and won such fervor seemed passing strange to Dove and me. With all the grace of goodness and gentle courage in which she faced the world alone, in all those years which had followed her father's death, she had never, to Dove's ken or mine, won a single suitor. Those burdens of care and sacrifice laid too soon upon her frail, young shoulders had borne early fruit — patience, wisdom, and a sweet endurance beyond her years—but on such harvest young men set small store. A taste for it comes late. It made her pleasing to her elders, but those of her own years shrank instinctively from its very perfectness. She had matured too soon. How then should any one so coolly virtuous know trial or passion? Surely so young a saint could have no warm impetuous hours to remember, no sweet abandonment, no pretty idyls—had she even a spring-time to recall?

Men admired her for her mind and heart, but in her presence secretly were ill at ease. Her self-dependence rendered useless their stronger arms accustomed to being leaned upon. She smiled upon them, it is true, but not as men like to be smiled upon—neither as a child, trustingly, nor as a queen, confident of their homage and gallant service. She appealed neither to their protection nor to their pride. She awoke the friend, but not the lover, in them; and so the years slipped by and she won no chivalry, because she claimed none. She had but asked and but received respect.

Our raillery, harmlessly meant, was not always kind, as I look back at it. It is scarcely pleasant to be reminded that among one's kind one is not preferred, yet Letitia bore all our jesting with steadfast pleasantry.

"Do I look forlorn? Do I look so helpless?" she would ask. Her very smile, her voice, her step, seemed in themselves an answer. "What do I want with a husband then?"

"Why," Dove would say, "to make you happy, Letitia."

"You child: I am perfectly happy."

"Well," Dove would answer, stubbornly, "to make you happier, then."

I have forgotten Letitia's answers — all but one of them:

"I lived so long with my scholar-love," she once said, sweetly, of her father, "I fear I never should be content with an ordinary man."

Dove declared that no one in Grassy Fordshire was half worthy of her cousin; at least, she said, she knew but one, and he was already wedded—and to a woman, she added, humbly, not half so good or wise or wonderful as Letitia. Dove stoutly held that Letitia could have married, had she wished it, and whom she would. Father would shake his head at that.

"No," he would say, "Letty is one of those women men never think of as a bride."

"But why?" Dove would demand then, loyally. "She is the very woman to find real happiness in loving and self-sacrifice. Adversity would never daunt her, and yet," my wife would say with scorn rising in her voice, "the very men who need such help and comprehension and comradeship in their careers, would pass her by, and for a chit of girl who would never be happy sharing their struggles—but only their success!"

"My dear," father would reply, sagely, "a man glories in his power to hand a woman something she cannot reach herself. Letty Primrose has too long an arm."

"But if a man once married Letitia—" Dove would protest, and father would chuckle then.

"Ah, yes, my dear, if one only would! But there's the rub. Doubtless he would find Letitia much like other women, quite willing he should reach things down to her from the highest shelf. But he must be a wise man to suspect just that —to guess what lies beneath our Letty's apparent self-sufficiency."

"An older man might," Dove once suggested. "A general, or a great professor, or a minister plenipotentiary."

"Doubtless," he answered, "but our Grassy Ford is a narrow world, my dear. The young sprigs in it are only silly lads, and the elder bachelors are very musty ones, I fear — and not an ambassador among them. I doubt very much if Letitia will ever meet him—that man you mean, who might choose Letty's love through wisdom, and whose wisdom she might choose through love."

Dove's answer was a sigh.

"Bertram," she said, "you must make some real nice, elderly bachelor doctor friends, and we'll ask them to visit us."

It seemed a likely plan, but nothing came of it, and the silly lads and the musty ones alike left our Letitia more and more to friendships beyond her years. From being so much in the company of her elders, she grew in time to be more like them. Her modesty became reserve; reserve, in turn, a certain awkwardness or shy aloofness in the presence of the other sex—primness, it was called. She had not forgotten how to smile; her talk was blithe enough with those she knew, and was still colored by her love for poetry, but it fast grew quainter and less colloquial; there was a certain old-fashioned care and subtlety about it, a rare completeness in its phrases not at all like the crude, half-finished ones with which our Grassy Ford belles were content. It added to her charm, I think, but to the evidence as well of that maturity and self-complacency which all men seemed to fear and shun, not one suspecting that the glow beneath meant youth — youth preserved through time and trial to be a light to her, or to Love belated.

Her brown hair turned to gray, her gray to white, and she still came down to us smiling good-morning; still worshipped Keats, still scorned the upstart who made her look; taught on, year after year, in the red brick school-house, wearing the wild flowers farm-boys gathered in the hills. Her life flowed on like a stream in summer, softly in shadow and in sun. She seemed content—no bitter note in her low voice, no glance of envy, malice, or chagrin in those kind gray eyes of hers, which beamed so gently upon others' loves; we used to wonder how they might have shone upon her own.

One day in August—it was again that anniversary birthday around which half my memories of her seem to cling—she gave me a copy of *In Memoriam*, and bought for herself the linen for another reticule. Neatly, and in the fashion of our grandmothers' day, she worked upon it her initials, L. and P., in Old-English letters, old-rose and gold.

"What," I asked, "is the figure meant for?"

"The figure? Where?"

"In the background there—the figure seven, in the lighter gold."

She bent to study it.

"There *is* a seven there," she said. "I must have used a lighter silk."

"Then shall you alter it?" I asked.

"No," she answered. "It is now too late."

"She means the figure," I explained to Dove.

"The letters also," Dove murmured, softly, as we turned away.

II

ON A CORNER SHELF

T five minutes to four o'clock the red school-house gave no sign of the redder life beating within its walls. The grounds about it, worn brown by hundreds of restless feet and marked in strange diagrams, the mystic symbols of hop-scotch, marbles, and three-old-cat, were quite deserted save for sparrows busy with crumbs from the mid-day luncheon-pails. Five minutes' later, one listening by the picket-fence might have heard faintly the tinkling of little bells, and a rising murmur that with the opening of doors burst suddenly into a tramping of myriad feet, while from the lower hallway two marching lines came down the outer stair, primly in step, till at the foot they sprang into wild disorder, a riot of legs and skirts, with the shouts and shrieks and shrill whistlings of children

loosed from bondage. When the noisy tide had swept down the broad walk into the street, Letitia might be seen following smilingly, her skirts surrounded by little girls struggling for the honor of being nearest and bearing her reticule.

At the end of happy days Letitia's face bore the imprint of a sweet contentment, as if the love she had given had been returned twofold, not only in the awkward caresses of her little ones, but in the sight of such tender buds opening day by day through her patient care into fuller knowledge of a great bright world about them. She strove earnestly to show them more of it than the school-books told; she aimed higher than mere correctness in the exercises, those anxious, careful, or heedless scribblings with which her reticule was crammed. In the geography she taught there were deeper colorings than the pale tints of those twenty maps the text-book held; greater currents flowed through those green and pink and yellow lands than the principal rivers there, and in the plains between them greater harvests had been garnered, according to her stories, than the principal products, principal exports—principal paragraphs learned by rote and recited senselessly.

Drawing, in Letitia's room, it was charged against her by one named Shears, who had the interests of the school at heart and jaw, had become a subterfuge for teaching botany as well.

"For draggin' in a study," as he told a group on the corner of Main and Clingstone streets, "not *in*cluded in the grammar-grade curriculum!"

He paused to let the word have full effect.

"For wastin' the scholars' time and gettin' their feet wet pokin' around in bogs and marshy places, a-pullin' weeds! And for what?—why, by gum, to *draw* 'em!"

His auditors chuckled.

"What," he asked, "are drawin'-books *for?*"

His fellow-citizens nodded intelligently.

"And even when she *does* use the books," cried Mr. Samuel Shears, "she won't let 'em draw a consarned circle or cross or square, without they tell her some fool story of Michael the Angelo!"

The crowd laughed hoarsely.

"And who *was* Michael the Angelo?" asked Mr. Shears, screwing his face up in fine derision and stamping one foot, rabbit-like, by way of

emphasis to his scorn. "Who *was* this here Michael the Angelo?"

Four men spat and the others shuffled.

"A *Dago!*" roared Shears, and the crowd was too much relieved to do more than gurgle. "What does my son care about Michael the Angelo?"

Letitia admitted, I believe, that *his* son didn't.

"And further*more*," said Mr. Shears, insinuatingly, "what I want to know is: why has she got them pitchers a-hanging around the school-room walls? Pitchers of Dago churches and Dago statures — and I guess *you* know what Dago statures are—I guess you know whether they're dressed like you and me!—I guess you fellows know all right—and if you don't, there's them that do. And, in conclusion, I want to ask right here: who's a-payin' for them there decorations?"

Mr. Shears spat, the crowd spat, and they adjourned.

Now, there may have been a dozen prints relieving the ugliness and concealing the cracks in the school-room walls, but all quite innocent, as I recall them: "Socrates in the Market-

Place," "The Parthenon," "The Battle of Salamis," "Christian Martyrs," a tragic moment in the arena of ancient Rome, "St. Peter's," I suppose, "St. Mark's by Moonlight," and of statues only one and irreproachable, the "Moses" of Michael Angelo. His "David" was Letitia's joy, but she never dreamed, I am sure, of its exhibition in a grammar-school, though I have heard her declare (shamelessly, Mr. Shears would say) that were it not for a Puritan weakness of eyesight hereditary in Grassy Ford, that lithe Jew's ideal figure would be a far better lesson to her boys than all the text-books in physiology.

"Might it not incite them to sling-shots?" queried Dove, softly.

"I don't agree with you," said Letitia, lost in her theme, and noting only the fact, and not the nature, of the opposition. "I don't agree with you at all. It would teach them the beauty of manly— Why do you laugh?"

If Shears could have heard her! His information, such as it was, had been derived from his only son, a youth named David, "not by Angelo," Letitia said, and hopelessly indolent, whose only fondness was for sticking pins into

smaller boys. He was useful, however, as a barometer in which the rise or fall of his surly impudence registered the parental feeling against her rule.

Shears and his kind held that the proper study of mankind was arithmetic. What would he not have said at the corner of Main and Clingstone streets, had he known that Letitia was trifling with Robinson's Complete? — that between its lines, she was teaching (surreptitiously would have been his word), an original, elementary course in ethics, a moral law of honesty, fair-dealing, and full-measure, so that all examples, however intricate, were worked out rigidly to the seventh decimal, by the Golden Rule!

Red geraniums bloomed in her school-room window, and on a corner-shelf, set so low that the children easily might have leaned upon it, lay Webster and another book—always one other; though sometimes large and sometimes small, now green, now red, now blue, now yellow, but always seeming to have been left there carelessly. Every volume bore on its fly-leaf two names—"David Buckleton Primrose," written in a bold, old-fashioned script in fading ink, and below it "Letitia Primrose," in a smaller, finer

but no less quaint a hand. That book, whatever its name and matter, had been left there purposely, you may be sure. Letitia remembered how young Keats drank his first sweet draught of Homer and became a Greek; how little lame Walter poured over border legends to become the last of the Scottish minstrels; and how that other, that English boy, swam the Hellespont in a London street, to climb on its farther side, that flowery bank called poesy. It was her dream that among her foster-children, as she fondly called them, there might be one, perhaps, some day—some rare soul waiting rose-like for the sun, who would find it shining on her school-room shelf. So she dropped there weekly in the children's way, as if by accident, and without a word to them unless they asked, books which had been her father's pride or her own young world of dreams—books of all times and mental seasons, but each one chosen with her end in mind. They were beyond young years, she admitted frankly, as school years go, but when her Keats came, she would say, smiling, they would be bread-and-wine to him; milk and wild-honey they had been to her.

"Suppose," said Dove, "it should be a girl

who bears away sacred fire from your shelf, Letitia?"

"Yes, it might be a girl," replied the schoolmistress. "Perhaps — who knows? — another 'Shakespeare's daughter'!" And yet, she added, and with the faintest color in her cheeks, knowing well that we knew her preference, she rather hoped it would be a boy.

Few could resist that book waiting by the dictionary; at least they would open it, spell out its title-page, flutter its yellowing leaves, looking for pictures, and, disappointed, close it and turn away. But sometimes one more curious would stop to read a little, and now and then, to Letitia's joy, a lad more serious than the rest would turn inquiringly to ask the meaning of what he found there; then she would tell its story and loan the volume, hoping that Johnny Keats had come at last.

No one will ever know how many subtle lures she set to tempt her pupils into pleasant paths, but men and women in Grassy Ford to-day remember that it was Miss Primrose who first said this, or told them that, and while her discipline is sometimes smiled at—she was far too trusting at times, they tell me—doubtless, no one is the

worse for it, since whatever evil she may have failed to nip, may be balanced now by the good of some lovely memory. Bad boys grown tall remembering their hookey-days do not forget the woman they cajoled with their forged excuses; and it is a fair question, I maintain, boldly, as one of that guilty clan, whether the one who put them on an honor they did not have, or, let us say, had mislaid temporarily—whether the recollection of Letitia Primrose and her innocence is not more potent now for good than the crimes she overlooked, for evil.

Sometimes I wonder if she was half so blind as she appeared to be, for as we walked one Sabbath by the water-side, with the sun golden on the marshes, and birds and flowers and caressing breezes beguiling our steps farther and farther from the drowsy town, I remember her saying:

"It is for this my boys play truant in the spring-time. Do you wonder, Bertram?"

For the best of reasons I did not. I was thinking of how the springs came northward to Grassy Fordshire when I was a runaway; and then suddenly as we turned a bend in Troublesome, there was a splash, and two bare feet sank

modestly into the troubled waters. There was a bubbling, and then a head emerged dripping from all its hairs. Young David Shears had dived in the nick of time.

III

A YOUNGER ROBIN

WHEN our boy was born we named him Robin Weatherby, after that elder Robin who had charmed my youth. If his babyhood lacked aught of love or discipline, it was neither Dove's fault nor Letitia's, for Robin's mother had ideas and a book on childhood, and dear Letitia did not need a book. In fact, she clashed with Dove's. I, as physician-in-ordinary to my child—for in dire emergencies in my own family I always employ an old-fogy rival—was naturally of some little service in consultation with the two ladies and the Book. Of the characters of these associates of mine, I need only say that Dove was ever an anxious soul, the Book a truthful but at times a vague one, while Letitia was all that could be desired as guide, philosopher, and friend. Alarming symptoms

might puzzle others, but never her; they might, even to myself, even to the Book, bode any one of twenty kinds of evil; to her they pointed solely, solemnly to one—that one, alas! which had carried off some dear child of her school.

Dove, I am sure, had never been impatient with Letitia, but now, such was the tension of these family conferences and such the gravity of the case involved, there were times, I noted, when the cousins addressed each other with the most exquisite and elaborate courtesy, lest either should think the other in the least disturbed. For example, there was that little affair of consolation — a sort of rubber make-believe with which young Robin curbed and soothed his appetite and invited pensiveness. Microbes, Letitia said, were—

Dove interposed to remind her that the things were boiled just seven—

Germs, Letitia argued, were not to be trifled with.

"Just seven times a week, my dear," said Dove, triumphantly.

"And besides," Letitia continued, undismayed, "they will ruin the shape of the child's mouth."

"But how?" cried Dove. "Pray tell me how, my love, when they are made in the very identical im—"

"And modern doctors," Letitia stated with some severity, "are doing away with so many foolish notions of our grandmothers."

"Yet our fathers and mothers," Dove replied, "were very fair specimens of the race, my dear. Shakespeare, doubtless, was rocked in a cradle, and his brains survived. They were quite intact, I think you will admit. *He* wasn't joggled into—"

"Yet who knows what he might have written, dear love," answered Letitia, "if he had been permitted to lie quite—"

"*You* try to make a child go to sleep, my darling, without *something!*" my wife suggested. "Just try it once, my dear."

"Cradles," said Letitia—but at this juncture I stepped in, authoritatively, as the father of my child. It is due to Dove, I confess gladly, and partly to Letitia also, that this fatherhood has been so pleasant to look back upon. Robin's mouth is very normal, as even Letitia will admit, I know, as she would be the last person in the world to say that his brains had suffered any in

the joggling. Somehow, by dint of boiling the consolation I suppose, and by what-not formulæ, we got him up at last on two of the sturdiest, little, round, brown legs that ever splashed in mud-puddle—Dove's Darling, my Old Fellow, and Letitia's Love.

Love she called him in their private moments, and other names as fond, I have no doubt; publicly he was her Archer, her Bowman, her Robin Hood. She, it was, who purchased him bow-and-arrows, and replaced for him without a murmur, three panes in the library windows and a precious little wedding vase. The latter cost her a pretty penny, but she reminded us that a boy, after all, will be a boy! She took great pride in his better marksmanship and sought a suit for him, a costume that should be traditional of archers bold.

"Have you cloth," she asked, "of the shade called Lincoln green?"

The clerk was doubtful.

"I'll see," she said. "Oh, Mr. Peabody! Mr. Peabody!"

"Well?" asked a man's voice hidden behind a wall of calicoes. "Well? What is it?"

"Mr. Peabody, have we any cloth called Abraham—"

"Not Abraham Lincoln," Letitia interposed, mildly. "You misunderstood me. I said Lincoln green."

"Same thing," said the clerk, tartly.

Mr. Peabody then emerged smilingly from behind his wall.

"How do you do, Miss Primrose," said he. "What can we do for you this morning?" Letitia carefully repeated her request. He shook his head, while the young clerk smiled triumphantly.

"No," he said. "You must be mistaken. I have never even heard of such a color—and if there was one of that name," he added, with evident pride in his even tones, "I should certainly know of it. We have other greens—"

Letitia flushed.

"Why," she explained, "the English archers were accustomed to wearing a cloth called Lincoln green."

Mr. Peabody smiled deprecatingly.

"I never heard of it," he replied, stiffly; "and, as I say, I have been in the business for thirty years."

"But don't you remember Robin Hood and his merry men?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the merchant, a great light breaking in upon him. "You mean the fairy stories! Ha, ha! Very good. Very good, indeed. Well, no, Miss Primrose, I'm afraid we can hardly provide you with the cloth that fairies—"

"Show me your green cloths—all of them," said Letitia, her cheeks burning.

"Certainly, Miss Primrose. Miss Baggs, show Miss Primrose all of our green cloths — *all* of them."

"Light green or dark green?" queried Miss Baggs, who had been delighted with the whole affair.

Letitia pondered. There had been some reason, she reflected, for Robin Hood's choice of gear.

"Something," she said, at last—"something as near to the shade of foliage as you can give me."

"I beg pardon?" inquired Miss Baggs.

"The color of leaves," explained Letitia.

"Well," Miss Baggs retorted, smartly, "some leaves are light, and some are dark, and some leaves are in-between."

There was a dangerous gleam in Letitia's eyes. "Show me *all* your green cloths," she requested, curtly—"all of them." Miss Baggs obeyed.

"I suppose it really isn't Lincoln green, you know," Letitia said, when she had brought the parcel home with her and had spread its contents upon the sofa, "but I hope you'll like it, Dove. It is the nearest to tree-green I could find."

It was, indeed.

Now, Dove had never heard of a boy in green, and had grave doubts, which it would not do, however, to even hint to dear Letitia; so made it was, that archer-suit, though by some strange freak of fancy that caused Letitia keen regret, Robin, dressed in it, could seldom be induced to play at archery, always insisting, to her discomfiture, that he was Grass!

"When you grow up, my bowman," she once told him, "I'll buy you a white suit, all of flannel, and father shall teach you to play at cricket in the orchard."

"But crickets are black," cried Robin, whose eye for color, or the absence of it, I told Letitia, was bound to ruin her best-laid English plans.

It was good to see them, the Archer Bold and

the Gray Lady walking together, hand-in-hand —the one beaming up, the other down; the one so subject to sudden leaps and bounds and one-legged hoppings to avoid the cracks, the other flurried lest those wild friskings should disturb the balance she had kept so perfectly all those years till then.

In their walks and talks lay many stories, I am sure — things which never will be written unless Letitia turns to authorship, for which it is a little late, I fear; but even then she would never dream of putting such simple matters down. She does not know at all the delicious Lady of the Linen Reticule, who, to herself, is commonplace enough. She might, perhaps, make a tale or two of the Archer in Lincoln Green, but what is the romance of an archer without the lady in it?

One drowsy afternoon on a Sunday in summer-time I stretched myself in my easy-chair with another for my slippered feet. My dinner had ended pleasantly with a love-in-a-cottage pudding which had dripped blissfully with a heavenly cataract of golden sauce. Dove had gone out on a Sabbath mission, rustling away in a gown sprinkled with rose-buds—one of those summer

things in which it is not quite safe for any woman to risk herself in this wicked world.

Such shallow thoughts were passing through my mind as Dove departed, and when the front gate clicked behind her, I opened a charming novel and went to sleep. I know I slept, for I walked in a path I have never seen. I should like to see it, for it must be beautiful in the spring-time. It was a kind of autumn when I was there. I was dragging my feet about in the yellow leaves, when a senile hollyhock leaned over quietly and tickled me on the ear. As I brushed it away I heard it giggling. Then a twig of pear-tree bent and trifled with my nose, which is a thing no gentleman permits, even in dreams, and I brushed it smartly. Then I heard a voice—I suppose the gardener's—telling something to behave itself. Then I swished again among the leaves. How long I swished there I have no notion, but I heard more voices by-and-by, and I remember saying to myself, "They are behind the gooseberries." They did not know, of course, that I was there, else they had talked more softly.

"No," said he, "you be the horsey."

"Oh no," said the other, "I'd rather drive."

"No, *you* be the horsey."

"Sh! Let me drive."

"I said *you* be the horsey."

"I be the horsey?"

"Yes. Whoa, horsey! D'up! Whoa! D'up!"

Then all was confusion behind the gooseberries and the horsey d'upped and whoaed, and whoaed and d'upped, till I all but d'upped. I *did* move, and the noise stopped.

How long I slept there I do not know, but I heard again those voices behind the vines, though more subdued now, mere tender undertones like lovers in a garden seat. Lovers I supposed them, and, keeping still, I listened:

"But I'm not your little boy," said one, "because you haven't any."

"Oh yes, you are," replied the other, confidently. "You're my little boy because I love you."

"But why don't you ask God to send you a little boy all your own, just four years old like me, so we could play together? Why don't you?"

"Because," the reply was, "you're all the little boy I need."

"But if you *did* ask God and the angel brought you a little boy, then his name would be Billie."

"Oh, would it?"

"Yes, his name would be Billie, because now Billie is the next name to Robin."

"What do you mean by the next name to Robin?"

"Why, 'cause now, first comes Robin, and then comes Billie, and then comes Tommy, or else Muffins, if you turn the corner—unless he's a girl—and then he's Annie."

"What?" gasped the second voice. "I don't understand."

"Well, then," the first voice answered, wearily, "call him Johnny."

I know at the time the explanation seemed quite clear to me, as it must have been to the second speaker, for the colloquy ended then and there. I might have peeked through the gooseberries and not been discovered, I suppose, but just then I went out shooting flamingoes with a friend of mine, and when I got back, some time that day, the gooseberry-vines were thick with rose-buds. And while I was gone a brook had come—you could hear it plainly on the other side — and I was surprised, I remember, and angry with my aunt Jemima (I never had an Aunt Jemima) for not telling me. I listened

awhile to the tinkle-tinkling till presently the burden changed to a

"Tra, la, la,
Tra, la, la,"

over and over, till I said to myself, "These are the Singing Waters the poets hear!" So I tip-toed nearer through the crackling leaves, and touching the rose-vines very deftly for fear of thorns, again I listened. My heart beat faster.

"It is an English linn!" I said, astonished, for there were words to it, English words to that singing rivulet! I could make out "gold" and "rue" and "youth."

"Some woodland secret!" I told myself; so I listened eagerly, scarcely breathing, and little by little, as my ears grew more accustomed to the sounds, I heard the song, not once, but often, each time more clearly than before:

"Many seek a coronet,
Many sigh for gold,
Some there are a-seeking yet—
(Never thought of you, my pet!)
—Now they're passing old.

"Many yearn for lovers true,
Some for sleep from pain,

Seeking laurel, some find rue—
(Oh, they never dreamed of you!)
—Now want youth again.

"Crown and treasure, love like wine,
Peace and laurel-tree,
Have I all, oh! world of mine—
(Soft little world my arms entwine)
—Youth thou art to me."

It seemed familiar, yet I could not place the song, till at last it came to me that Dr. Primrose wrote it for his only child, a kind of lullaby which he used to chant to her.

Then I remembered how all that while I had been listening with my eyes shut, and so I opened them to find the singer—and saw Letitia with Robin sleeping in her arms.

IV

HIRAM PTOLEMY

ONE afternoon in a spring I am thinking of, passing from my office to the waiting-room beyond it, I found alone there a little old gentleman seated patiently on the very edge of an old-fashioned sofa which occupied one corner of the room. He rose politely at my entrance, and, standing before me, hat in hand, cleared his throat and managed to articulate:

"Dr. Weatherby, I believe."

I bowed and asked him to be seated, but he continued erect, peering up at me with eyes that watered behind his steel-bowed spectacles. He was an odd, unkempt figure of a man; his scraggly beard barely managed to screen his collar-button, for he wore no tie; his sparse, gray locks fell quite to the greasy collar of his coat, an antique

frock, once black but now of a greenish hue; and his inner collar was of celluloid like his dickey and like the cuffs which rattled about his lean wrists as he shook my hand.

"My name is Percival—Hiram De Lancey Percival," he said. "De Lancey was my mother's name."

"Will you come into my office, Mr. Percival?" I asked.

"No—no, thank you—that is, I am not a patient," he explained. "I just called on my way to—"

He wet his lips, and as he said "New York" I fancied I could detect beneath the casual manner he assumed, no inconsiderable self-satisfaction, accompanied by a straightening of the bent shoulders, while at the same moment he touched with one finger the tip of his collar and thrust up his chin as if the former were too tight for him. With that he laid his old felt hat among the magazines on my table and took a chair.

"The fact is," he continued, "I am a former protégé of the late Rev. David Primrose, of whom you may—"

He paused significantly.

"Indeed!" I said. "I knew Dr. Primrose very well. He was a neighbor of ours. His daughter—"

My visitor's face brightened visibly and he hitched his chair nearer to my own.

"I was about to ask you concerning the—the daughter," he said. "Is she—?"

"She lives with my family," I replied. "Letitia—"

"Ah, yes," he said; "Letitia! That is the name—Letitia Primrose—well, well, well, well. Now, that's nice, isn't it? She lives with you, you say."

"Yes," I explained, "she has lived with my family since her father's death."

"He was a remarkable man, sir," Mr. Percival declared. "Yes, sir, he was a remarkable man. Dr. Primrose was a pulpit orator of unusual power, sir—of unusual power. And something of a poet, sir, I believe."

"Yes," I assented.

"I never read his verse," said the little old gentleman, "but I have heard it said that he was a fine hand at it—a fine hand at it. In fact, I—"

He paused modestly.

"I am something of a writer myself."

"Indeed!" I said.

"Oh yes; oh yes, I—but in a different line, sir, I—"

Again he hesitated, apparently through humility, so that I encouraged him to proceed.

"Yes?" I said.

"I—er—in fact, I—" he continued, shyly.

"Something philosophical," I ventured.

"Yes; oh yes," he ejaculated. "Well, no; not that exactly."

"Scientific then, Mr. Percival."

He beamed upon me.

"Well, now, how did you guess it? How did you guess it?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I merely took a chance at it," I replied, modestly.

"Well, now, that's remarkable. Say — you seem to be a clever young fellow. Are you—are you interested—in science?" he inquired, sitting forward on the very edge of his chair.

"Well, as a doctor, of course," I began.

"Of course, of course," he interposed, "but did you ever take up ancient matters to any extent?"

"Well, no, I cannot say that I have."

"Latin and Greek, of course?" suggested Mr. Percival.

"Oh yes, at college—Latin and Greek."

"Dr. Weatherby," said my visitor, his eyes shining, "I don't mind telling you: I am a—"

He wetted his lips and glanced nervously about him.

"We are quite alone," I said.

"Dr. Weatherby, I am an Egyptologist!"

"You are?" I answered.

"Yes," he replied. "Yes, sir, I am an Egyptologist."

"That," I remarked, "is a very abstruse department of knowledge."

"It is, sir," replied the little old gentleman, hitching his chair still nearer, so that leaning forward he could pluck my sleeve. "I am the only man who has ever successfully deciphered the inscriptions on the great stone of Iris-Iris!"

"You don't say so!" I exclaimed.

"I do, Dr. Weatherby. I am stating facts, sir. Others have attempted it, men eminent in the learned world, sir, but I alone—here in my bosom—"

He tapped the region of his heart, where a lump suggested a roll of manuscript. "I alone,

Dr. Weatherby, have succeeded in translating those time-worn symbols. Dr. Weatherby"—he lowered his voice almost to a whisper—"it has been the patient toil of seven years!"

He sprang back suddenly in his chair, and drawing a red bandanna from his coat-tails proceeded to mop his brow.

"Mr. Percival," I said, cordially, looking at my watch, "won't you come to dinner?" His eyes sparkled.

"Well, now, that's good of you," he said. "That's very good of you. I *was* intending to go on to New York to-night by the evening-train, but since you insist, I might wait over till to-morrow."

"Do so," I urged. "You shall spend the night with us. Letitia will be delighted to see an old friend of her father, and my wife will be equally pleased, I know. Have you your grip with you?"

"It is just here—behind the lounge," said Mr. Percival, springing forward with the agility of a boy and drawing from beneath the flounce of the sofa-cover a small valise of a kind now seldom seen except in garrets or in the hands of such little, old-fashioned gentlemen as my guest.

It had been glossy black in its day, but now was sadly bruised and a little mildewed with overmuch lying in attic dust. In the very centre of the outer flap, which buckled down over a shallow pocket, intended, I suppose, for comb and brush, was a small round mirror, dollar-sized, which by some miracle had escaped the hand of time.

"By-the-way," I said, as we entered my buggy, "you haven't told me—"

He interrupted me, smiling delightedly.

"Why I am going to New York?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well, sir, I'll tell you. I'll tell you, doctor, and it's quite a story."

"Where is your home, Mr. Percival?"

"Sand Ridge," he said, "has *been* my home, but I expect to reside hereafter in—"

He wetted his lips and pulled at his collar again—

"In New York, sir."

On our drive homeward he told his story. Early in manhood he had been a carpenter by day, by night a student of the ancient languages, which he acquired by dint of such zeal and sacrifice that Dr. Primrose, then in the zenith of his

own career, discovering the talents of the poor young artisan, urged and aided him to obtain a pulpit in a country town. He proved, I imagine, an indifferent preacher, drifting from place to place, and from denomination to denomination, to become at last a teacher of Greek and Latin in the Sand Ridge Normal and Collegiate Institute. Whatever moments he could spare from his academic duties, he had devoted eagerly to Egyptian monuments, and more particularly to that one of Iris-Iris which had baffled full half a century of learned men.

"But how did you do it?" I inquired. He wriggled delightedly in the carriage-seat.

"Doctor," he said, "how does a man perform some marvellous surgical feat, which no one had ever done, or dreamed of doing, before? Eh?"

"I see," I replied, nodding sagely. "Such things are beyond our ken."

"I did it," he chuckled. "I did it, doctor. And now, sir—"

He paused significantly.

"You are going to New York," I said.

"Exactly. To—"

"Publish," I suggested.

"The very word!" he cried. "Doctor, I am

going to give my discovery to the world—to the world, sir!—not merely for the edification of savants, but for the enlightenment of my fellow-men."

"By George!" I said, "that's what I call philanthropy, Mr. Percival."

"Well, sir," he replied, modestly, "all I ask—all I ask in return, sir, is that I may be permitted to spend the remainder of my days, rent free and bread free, in some hall of learning, that I may edit my books and devote myself to further research undismayed by the—the—"

"Wolf at the door," I suggested.

"Exactly," he replied. "That's all I ask."

"It is little enough," I remarked.

"Doctor," he said, solemnly, "it is enough, sir, for any learned man."

When I reached home with my unexpected guest, Dove and Letitia smilingly welcomed him; I say smilingly, for there was that about the little old gentleman which defied ill-humor. He seemed shy at first, as might be expected of a bachelor-Egyptologist, but the simple manners he encountered soon reassured him. I led him to our best front bedroom, where he stood, dazzled apparently by the whiteness and ruffles

all about him, and could not be induced to set down his valise till he had spread a paper carefully upon the rug beneath it.

"Now, I guess I'll just wash up," he said, "if you'll permit me," looking doubtfully at the spotless towels and the china bowl decorated with roses, which he called a basin. I assured him that they were there to use.

It was not long before we heard him wandering in the upper halls, and hastening to his rescue I found him muttering apologies before a door through which apparently he had blundered, looking for the staircase. Safe on the lower floor again, Letitia put him at his ease with her kind questions about Egyptology, and the delighted scientist was in the midst of a glowing narrative of the great stone of Iris - Iris when dinner was announced. It was evident that Dove's table quite disconcerted him with its superfluity of glass and silver, and dropping his meat-fork on the floor, he strenuously resisted all Dove's orders to replace it from the pantry.

"No, no, dear madam," he exclaimed, pointing to the shining row beside his plate, "do not disturb yourself, I pray. One of these extras here will do quite as well."

During the dinner Letitia plied him with further questions till he wellnigh forgot his plate in his elation at finding such sympathetic auditors. Dove considerately delayed the courses while he talked on, bobbing forward and backward in his chair, his slight frame swayed by his agitation, his face glowing, and his beard bristling with its contortions.

"Never," he told me afterwards, as we passed from the dining-room arm-in-arm—"never have I enjoyed more charming and intelligent conversation—never, sir!"

I offered him cigars, but he declined them, observing that while he never used "the weed," he had up-stairs in his valise, if we would permit him—

We did so, though none the wiser as to what he meant, for he did not complete his sentence, but, bowing acknowledgment, he briskly disappeared, to return at once without further mishap in our deceitful upper hallway — reappearing with a paper bag which he untwisted and offered gallantly to the ladies.

"Lemon-drops," he said. "Permit me, Mrs. Weatherby. Oh, take more, Miss Letitia—do, I beg; they are quite inexpensive, I assure you—

quite harmless and inexpensive. Help yourself liberally, Mrs. Weatherby. Lemon-drops, as you are doubtless aware, doctor, are the most healthful of sweets, and as a—have another, Miss Primrose, do!—as a relaxation after the day's toil are much to be preferred, if you will pardon my saying so, Dr. Weatherby—much to be preferred to that poisonous cigar you are smoking there."

"Quite right, Mr. Percival," I assented.

"They are very nice," Dove said.

"Oh, they are delicious!" cried Letitia.

"Are they not?" said the little man, delighted with his hospitality, and so I left them — two ladies and an Egyptologist sucking lemon-drops and talking amiably of the great stone of Iris-Iris—while I attended on more modern matters, but with regret. I returned, however, in time to escort the scientist to his bedroom, where he opened his valise and took from it a faded cotton night-gown, which with a few papers and a Testament seemed its sole contents. His books, he explained, had gone on by freight. As I turned to leave him he said, earnestly:

"Doctor, my old friend's daughter is a most remarkable woman, sir — a most remarkable woman."

"She is, indeed," I assented.

"Why," said he, "she evinced an interest in the smallest detail of my work! Nothing was too trivial, or too profound for her. I was astonished, sir."

"She is a scholar's daughter, you must remember, Mr. Percival."

"Ah!" said he. "That's it. That's it, doctor. And what an ideal companion she would make for another scholar, sir!—or any man."

Next morning I was called into the country before our guest had risen, and when I returned at noon he had gone, leaving me regretful messages. I heard then what had happened in my absence. Hiram Ptolemy—it is the name we gave to our Egyptologist—had awakened soon after my departure and was found by Dove walking meditatively in the garden. After breakfast, while my wife was busy with little Robin, Letitia listened attentively to a further discourse on the Iris-Iris, which, she was told, bore on its surface a glorious message from the ancient to the modern world.

"It will cause, dear madam," said the scientist, his eyes dilating and his voice trembling with emotion, "a revolution in our retrospective

vision; it will bring us, as it were, face to face with a civilization that will shame our own!"

Letitia told Dove there was a wondrous dignity in the little man as he spoke those words. Then he paused in his eloquence.

"Miss Primrose," he said, "permit me to pay you a great compliment: I have never in my life had the privilege — of meeting a woman — of such understanding as your own. You are remarkably — remarkably like your learned and lamented father."

"Oh, Mr. Percival," Letitia said, flushing, "you could not say a kinder thing."

"And yet," said the scientist, "you—you are quite unattached, are you not?"

"Quite—what, Mr. Percival?"

"Unattached," he repeated, "by ties of—the affections?"

"Oh, quite," she answered, "quite unattached, Mr. Percival."

"But surely," he said, "you still have—"

He paused awkwardly.

"Oh," said Letitia, "I shall never marry, Mr. Percival—if you mean that."

He bowed gravely.

"Doubtless, dear madam—you know best."

V

A. P. A.

ONE spring a strange infection spread through the land and appeared suddenly in our corner of it. First a rash became a matter of discussion in our public places, but was not thought serious until the journals of the larger cities brought us news that set our town aflame with apprehension. Half our citizens broke out at once in a kind of measles, not, however, of the common or school-boy sort—that speckled cloud with a silver lining of no-more-school-till-it's-over—nor yet that more malignant type called German measles. It was, in fact, quite Irish in its nature, generally speaking, and in particular it was what might be termed anti-papistical—for, hark you! it had been discovered that the Catholics were arming secretly to take the world by storm!

A. P. A.

There are many Romanists in Grassy Ford. St. Peter's steeple, tipped with its gilded cross, towers higher than our Protestant spires, and on the Sabbath a hundred farmers tie their horses beneath its sheds and follow their womenfolk and flocks of children in to mass. In those days Father Flynn was the priest, a youngish, round-faced man, who chanted his Latin with a rich accent derived from Donegal, and who was not what is called militant in his manner, but was, in fact, the mildest-spoken of our Grassy Ford divines. He held aloof from those theological disputes which sometimes set his Protestant brethren by the ears, declining politely all invitations to attend the famous set debates between our Presbyterian and Universalist ministers, which ended, I remember, in a splendid God-given victory for—the one whose flock you happened to be in. Father Flynn only smiled at such encounters; he was not belligerent, and while his parish might with some good reason be described as coming from fine old fighting stock, it had never given evidence, so far as I am aware, of any desire to use cold steel, its warm, red, hairy fists having proven equal to those little emergencies which sometimes arise

—more particularly on a Saturday night, at Riley's. But when it was whispered, then spoken aloud, and finally charged openly on the street corners and even in letters to the *Gazette*, then edited by Butters's son, that Father Flynn was training a military company in the basement of St. Peter's church, that the young Romanists had been armed with rifles, and that ammunition was being stored stealthily and by night under the very altar!—and this by order from the Vatican, where a gigantic plot was brewing to seize the New World for the Pope!—then it was shrewdly observed by those who held the rumors to be truth that Father Flynn *did* have the look of a conspirator and that he walked with a military ease and swing.

The priest and his flock denied the charges with indignant eloquence, but without convincing men like Shears, who argued that the guilty were ever eager to deny. Shears himself was of no persuasion, religious or otherwise, but belonged by nature to the great party of the Opposition, whose village champion he was, whether the issue was the paving of a street or a weightier matter like the one in hand, of protecting the nation, as he said, from the treason

of its citizens and the machinations of a decaying power eager to regain its ancient sway! He was a lawyer by profession, but one whose time hung heavily on his hands, and, frequenting village shops where others like him gathered daily to argue and expound, he would hold forth glibly on any theme, the chief and awe-inspiring quality of his eloquence being an array of formidable statistics, culled Heaven knows where, but which few who listened had the knowledge or temerity to oppose. He was now brimming with figures concerning Rome — ancient, mediæval, or modern Rome: "Gentlemen, you may take your choice; I'm your man." He was armed also, by way of climax and reserve, should statistics fail to convince his auditors, with some strange stories having a spicy flavor of Boccaccio, which he told in a lowered voice as illustrations of what had been and what might be again should priests prevail.

To hear him pronounce the Eternal City's name was itself ominous. His mouth, always a large one, expanded visibly as he boomed out "R-rome!" discharging it as from a cannon's muzzle, and with such significance and effect that many otherwise sanguine men began to

suspect that there might be truth in his solemn warnings. Lights *had* been seen in St. Peter's church at night! Catholic youths *did* hold some kind of drill there on certain week-day evenings! And, lastly, it was pointed out, Father Flynn himself had ceased denials!

"And why?" Shears asked. "Why, gentlemen? I'll tell ye!—*I'll* tell ye!—orders from R-rome! You mark my words—orders from Rome!"

Apprehension grew. A society was formed, with Shears at its head, to protect the village, and assist, if need be, the State itself. Meetings were held—secret and extraordinary sessions—in the Odd Fellow's Block. Watches were set on the priest's house and on St. Peter's. Resolute men stood nightly in the shrubbery near the church lest guns and cartridges should be added to the stores already there. Zealous Protestant matrons of the neighborhood supplied hot coffee to the midnight sentinels. All emergencies had been provided for. At a given signal — three pistol-shots in quick succession, and the same repeated at certain intervals—the Guards of Liberty would assemble, armed, and march at once in two divisions, a line of skirmishers under Tommy

Morgan, the light-weight champion of Grassy Fordshire, followed by the main body in command of Shears. No one, however, was to fire a shot, Shears said—"not a shot, gentlemen, till you can see the whites of their eyes. Remember your forefathers!"

Every night now half the town pulled down its curtains and opened doors with the gravest caution.

"Who's there?"

"Peters, you fool."

"Oh, come in, Peters. I thought it might be—"

"I know: you thought it might be the Pope."

It was considered wise to take no chances. Assassination, it was widely known, had ever been a favorite method with conspirators, especially at Rome, and Shears made it plain, in the light of history, that "the vast fabric," as he loved to call the Romish world, was composed of men who, certain of absolution, would murder their dearest friends if so commanded by cipher orders from the Holy See!

Meanwhile, in Grassy Ford, friendships of years were crumbling. Neighbors passed each other without a word; some sneered, some jeered, some

quarrelled openly in the street, and there were fisticuffs at Riley's, and in the midst of this civil strife some one remembered—Shears himself, no doubt—that Dago pictures hung shamelessly on the walls of a public school-room!

"Michael the Angelo" had been a Catholic!

What if Letitia Primrose were the secret ally of the Pope! . . .

"But she's not a Catholic," said one.

"She's Episcopalian," said another.

"What's the difference?" inquired a third.

"Mighty little, *I* can tell ye," said Colonel Shears. "The thing's worth seein' to."

A knock on Letitia's door that afternoon was so peremptory that she answered it in haste and some trepidation, yet was not more surprised by the sudden summons than by the man who stepped impressively into the school-room. The pupils turned smilingly to David Shears.

"Your father!" they whispered.

It was, indeed, Colonel Samuel Shears, of the Guards of Liberty. He declined the chair Letitia offered him.

"No," he said, majestically, "I thank you. I prefer"—and here he thrust up his chin by way of emphasis—"to stand."

The school giggled.

"Silence!" said Letitia. "I am ashamed."

Colonel Shears coolly surveyed the array of impudent youths before him, or perhaps not so much surveyed it as turned upon it, slowly and from side to side, the calm defiance of his massive jowls. He was well content with that splendid mug of his, which he carried habitually at an angle and elevation well calculated to spread dismay. Upon occasion he could render it the more remarkable by a firm compression of the under-lip, pulled gravely down at the corners into what old Butters used to say was a plain attempt "to out-Daniel Webster." The resemblance ended, however, in the regions before described. His brow, it should be stated, did not attest the majesty below them, nor did his small eyes glower with any brooding, owl-like light of wisdom, as he supposed, but bulged rather with a kind of fierce bravado, as if perpetually he were saying to the world:

"Did I hear a snicker?"

Colonel Shears surveyed the school, and then, more slowly, the pictures on the walls about him, turning sharply and fixing his gaze upon Letitia.

[Point One: She was clearly ill at ease.]

[Point Two: A guilty flush had overspread her features.]

"These pictures—" said Colonel Shears, with a wave of his hand in their direction. "Who—if I may be so bold"—and here he raised his voice to the insinuating higher register—"who, may I inquire, paid for them?"

"I did, Mr. Shears," Letitia answered.

"A-ah! *You* paid for them?"

"I did."

"Very good," he replied. "And now, if I may take the liberty to—"

"Pray don't apologize, Mr. Shears."

The Colonel's crest rose superior to the interruption.

"If I may be permitted," he said, "to repeat my humble question—may I ask, was it *your* money—that bought—the pictures?"

"It was."

"Your own?"

"My own."

"You are remarkably generous, Miss Primrose."

"I think not," said Letitia, with increasing dignity. "You will pardon me, Mr. Shears, if I

continue with my classes. After school I shall be at liberty to discuss the matter. Meanwhile, won't you be seated?"

Colonel Shears for the second time declined, but asked permission, humbly he said, to examine the works of art upon the walls. His request was granted, and Letitia proceeded with her class. When the inspector had made a critical circuit of the room, and not without certain significant clearings of his throat and some sharp glances intended to catch Letitia unawares, he sniffed the geraniums in the window and picked up a book lying on the corner shelf. He glanced idly at its title and—started! —gasped!—and then, horrified, and as if he could not believe his bulging eyes, which fairly pierced the covers of the little volume, he read aloud, in a voice that echoed through the school-room:

"*The Lays of Ancient Rome* — by Thomas — Babington—Macaulay!"

Letitia, whose back was turned, jumped at the unexpected roar behind her, and the Colonel, perceiving that evidence of what he had suspected, now strode forward with an air of triumph, tapping the *Lays* with his heavy forefinger.

"Pardon me," he said, his countenance illumined by a truly terrible smile of accusation, "but when, may I ask, did these here heathen tales become a part of the school curriculum?"

"They are not a part of it," replied Letitia.

"Ah! They are *not* part of it! You admit it, then? Then may I ask when you *made* them a part of it, Miss Primrose?"

"The stories of Roman heroes—" Letitia began.

"That is not my question. That is not my humble question. *When* did these here Romish—"

"Mr. Shears," Letitia interposed, flushed, but speaking in a quiet tone she sometimes used, and which the Colonel might well have heeded had he known her, "I observe that you are not familiar with Macaulay. I shall be pleased to loan you the volume, to take home with you and read at leisure. You will find it charming."

She turned abruptly to the class behind her.

"We will take for to-morrow's lesson the examples on page one hundred and thirty-three."

The Colonel glared a moment at the stiff little back before him, and then at the book, which he slipped resolutely into his pocket. A dozen

strides brought him to the door, where he turned grandly with his hand upon the knob.

"I bid you," he said, with a fine, ironical lowering of the under-lip, and bowing slightly, "good-day, ma'am," and the door closed noisily behind him. There was a tittering among the desks. Young David Shears, red-faced and scowling, dropped his eyes before his schoolmates' gaze. Letitia tapped sharply on her bell.

That evening the president of the school-board called and talked long and earnestly with Letitia in our parlor. Mr. Roach was a furniture dealer by trade, a leading citizen by profession—a tight, little, sparrow-like man, who had risen by dint of much careful eying of the social and political weather to a place of honor in the village councils. He was considered safe and conservative, which was merely another way of saying that he never committed himself on any question, public or private, till he had learned which way the wind was blowing. He smiled a good deal, said nothing that anybody could remember, and voted with the majority. Out of gratitude the majority had rewarded him, and he was now the custodian of our youth—the

sentinel, alert and fearful of the slightest shadow, starting even at the sound of his own footfall on the Ramparts of the Republic, as Colonel Shears once called our public schools. He had come, therefore, under the shadow of the night, but out of kindness, as he himself explained, to advise the daughter of an old friend—and in a voice so low and cautious that Dove, seated in the room beyond, heard nothing but a soothing murmur in response to Letitia's spirited but respectful tones. In departing, however, he was heard to say:

"Oh, by-the-way—er—I think you had better not mention my calling, Miss Primrose. Better not mention it, I guess. It—er—hum—might do harm, you know. You understand."

"Perfectly," replied Letitia. "Good-night." When the door was closed she turned to Dove.

"What do you think that little—that man wants?" she asked.

"Don't know, I'm sure."

"Wants me to take down all my pictures—"

"Your pictures!"

"Yes—and remove all books but text-books from the school-room. And listen: he says my geraniums — fancy! my poor little red gera-

niums!—are 'not provided for in the curriculum.'"

"The curriculum!" cried Dove, hysterically.

"The curriculum," replied Letitia, without a smile. "Do you know what I asked him?" She leaned her chin upon her hands and gazed at Dove's laughing face across the table. "Do you know what I asked that man?"

"No."

"I asked him if Samuel Luther Shears was provided for in the curriculum."

"You didn't say *Luther*, Letitia!"

"I did—I said Luther."

"Darling! And what did he say to that?"

Letitia smiled.

"What could he say, my love?"

VI

TRUANTS IN ARCADY

THE excitement vanished as it had come, in our tranquil air. A few keen April nights had been sufficient for the sentinels in the lilac-bushes, who wearied of yawning at St. Peter's silent and gloomy walls. Their ardor and the matrons' midnight coffee cooling together, they were withdrawn, and the Guards themselves, though they had no formal mustering-out, forgot their fears and countersigns and met no more. Friendships were renewed. Neighbors nodded again across their fences. Protestant housewives dropped Catholic-vended sugar into their tea, and while there were men like Shears, who still in dreams saw candles burning, St. Peter's arsenal became a quiet parish church again.

Untouched by the whirlwind's passing, Le-

titia's window-garden went on blooming red, her pictures still hung defiantly on the walls, and classic fiction tempted our youth to her corner shelf. Colonel Shears, however, in that single visit to the school-room, had found new texts for his loquacity, and, our courts failing as usual to furnish him with sufficient cases to engross his mind, he devoted himself with new ardor to our public welfare, and recalled eloquently, to those who had time to listen, the little, old, red school-house of their youth, the simpler methods of the old school-masters, who had no fads or foibles beyond the birch, and who achieved, he said—witness his hearers, to say nothing of his humble self—results to which the world might point with satisfaction if not with pride. Had the modern schools produced an Abraham Lincoln, he wished to know?

"Not by a jugful," was his own reply. "You may talk about your kindergartens, and your special courses, and your Froebel, and your Delsarte, and you may hang up your Eyetalian pictures on the wall, and stick up geraniums in your windows — but where is your Abraham? That's what I ask, gentlemen. I tell you, the schools they had when you and I were boys—

gentlemen, they were ragged—they were ragged, as we were—but they turned out men! And you mark my words: there ain't any old maid in Grassy Ford, with all her ancient classics, and her new methods, and her gimcracks and flowerpots, that 'll ever—produce—an Honest—Abe!"

I am told that the crowd agreed with him so heartily and with such congratulatory delight that he was emboldened to announce himself then and there as a candidate for the school-board. Though he failed of election, there was always a party in Grassy Ford opposed to new-fangled methods in the schools. Letitia herself was quite aware that even among her fellow-teachers there were those who smiled at her geraniums, and there had been some criticism of her manner of conducting classes. Shears was fond of relating how a visitor to her room had found a class in fractions discussing robins' eggs! Letitia explained the matter simply enough, but the fact remained for the Colonel to enlarge upon.

"A lesson," he said, "in Robinson's *Complete Arithmetic*, page twenty-seven, may end in somebody's apple-tree, or the top of Sun Dial, or Popocatapetl, or Peru! Gentlemen, I maintain that such dilly-dallying is a subversion of the—"

"Subversion!" growled old man Butters, who still came out on sunny days with the aid of his cane. "I calculate you mean it's not right."

"That," said the orator, suavely, "is the meaning I intended to convey, Mr. Butters."

"Well, then, you're wrong," grumbled the old man. "Why, that there girl" — he called her so till the day he died, this side of ninety— "that there girl's a trump, Sam Shears, *I* tell ye. She teaches Robinson and God A'mighty, too!"

Letitia was often now in the public eye; her teaching was made a campaign issue, though all her nature shrank from such contests. It was easy to attack her manner of instruction, and sometimes difficult to defend it—it had been so subtle in its plan, and so unusual in its execution, and, moreover, time alone could disclose what fruits would ripen from its flowery care. Old Mr. Butters had put roughly what Dr. Primrose himself had taught:

"Dearly beloved, in the fountains of learning, no less than in the water-brooks, His lilies blow."

"Wouldst thou love God?" he asked, in the last sermon that he ever wrote. "First, love His handiwork."

It was his daughter's motto. It hung on the walls of her simple chamber, with others from her "other poets," as she used to call them—little rubrics printed for her in red and gold at the "Pide Bull." That handiwork of God which she still called Grassy Fordshire was so full of marvels to this poet's daughter, there were so many flowers in it, the birds there sang so blithely, its waters ran with such tremulous messages echoed by woods and whispered by meadow-grasses, its skies, melting into glowing promises in the west, shone thereafter with such jewelled truths, she could hold no text-books higher than her Lord's.

It was not mere duty that drew her morn after morn, year after year, to the red-brick school-house. All the tenderness, all those eager hopes and fears which she lavished so upon her labor, meant life and love to her, for she truly loved them—those troops of laughing, heedless children, passing like flocks of birds, stopping with her for a little twittering season to seize her bounty and, as it seemed to her, fly on gayly and forget.

It may be that I write prejudiced in her favor, but I write as one knowing the dream of a wom-

an's lifetime to set those young feet straight in pleasant paths, to open those wondering eyes to the beauty of an ancient world about them, in every leaf of it, and wing—in the earth below and the sky above it, and there not only in the flawless azure, but in the rain-clouds' gloom.

"Dark days are also beautiful," she used to tell them. "Had you thought of that?"

They had not thought of it. It was one of those subtler things which text-books do not say; but Letitia taught them, and a woman of Grassy Ford, when sore bereft, once said to me: "Dark days, doctor, are also beautiful. Miss Primrose told us that, when we went to school to her. It was of clouds she spoke, but I remembered it—and now I know."

"Oh, Miss Primrose," Johnny Murray used to say. "Do you remember when I went to school to you? Do you remember where I sat—there by the window? Well, it's awfully funny, but do you know, I never add or multiply or subtract but I smell geraniums."

Perhaps, the Colonel would reply, that was why Johnny Murray deserted the ledgers he was set to keep—the scent of the flowers in them proved too strong for him. It may be so, for

little things count so surely; it may be the reason he is to-day a sun-browned farmer instead of a lily-white clerk in his father's store. From the geraniums in a school-room window to a thousand peach-trees blooming in a valley is a long journey, but it was for just such journeys that Letitia taught, and not merely for that shorter one which led through her petty school-room to the grade above.

Letitia tells me that sitting there at her higher desk above those rows of heads, she used to think of them as flowers, and of her school-room as a garden. Often then it would come to her how pleasant a task it was to tend the roses there — golden-haired Laura Vane, and Alice Bishop, and Isabel Walton, and handsome, black-eyed Tommy Willis, whose pranks are famous in Grassy Fordshire still; then, at the doting thought of them, her heart would smite her, and she would turn to those other homelier flowers. It must have been in some such moment of repentance that Susan Leary, chancing to raise her eyes to her adored school-mistress, found Letitia smiling so amiably upon her that the girl blushed, and from that hour grew more mindful of her scolding looks; her freckled face was

scrubbed quite glossy after that, her dress was neater, her ribbons tied, till by-and-by, to Letitia's wonder and reward, she found in that beaming Irish face upturned to her, color and fragrance for her very soul.

Young Peter Bauer was a German sprout transplanted steeragewise to a corner of the garden, and slow in budding, his face as blank as the blackboard-wall he grew beside; but one fine morning, at a single question in the B geography, it burst into roseate bloom.

"Teacher, teacher, I know dot! Suabia ist in Deutschland. Mein vater ist in Deutschland! Ich bin—"

And after that Peter was a poppy on Friday afternoons, reading essays on his fatherland. Thus, honest gardener that Letitia was, she trained and pruned, disdaining nothing because of weediness, believing that what would bear a leaf would bear a flower as well. To leave at four o'clock, to return at nine and find one open which had been shut before!—is it not the gardener's morning joy?

It was not alone the plants which refused to grow for her that caused her pain. These at least she had never loved, however patiently

she had cared for them. There were wayward beauties in her garden who on tenderer stalks bore longer thorns. She learned, in her way, the lesson mothers learn in theirs, who sometimes love and toil and sacrifice unceasingly, and wait, years or forever, for reward.

"Remember, Miss Primrose, you are not a mother," snapped a certain sharp-tongued matron of our town who had disagreed with her.

"Oh," said Letitia, "but I have loved so many children. I am a kind of mother."

"Mother!" cried the matron.

"Yes," Letitia answered. "I am a mother—without a child."

Had they been her children, it had been easier to forgive their thoughtlessness. Offended sometimes by her discipline, they said plain things of her lack of pretty youth; they whispered lies of her; she shed some tears, I know, over those scribblings which she intercepted or found forgotten on the school-room floor. Then her garden was the abode of shadows, her efforts vain there. Sometimes, for solace, she sought out Dove, but the habit of lonely thinking had grown upon her; it had been enforced by her maidenhood.

While I am not a herb-doctor by diploma, I am one by faith, simples have wrought such speedy cures in my own gray hours, and Grassy-Fordshire is so green with them that a walk by Troublesome or a climb on Sun Dial is in itself a marvellous remedy, aromatic and anodyne. In my drives to patients beyond the town, I have been seized suddenly by a kind of fever. There are no pills for it, or powders, or any drugs in all the bottles on my shelves—but a jointed fishing-rod and line kept in the bottom of a doctor's buggy is efficacious if applied in time. Often when that spell was on me I have turned Pegasus towards the nearest stream, and while he nibbled, one hour on a scented bank, fish or not—sixty drops from the grass-green phial of a summer's day—has restored my soul. Clattering home again at double-quick, Pegasus's ears on end, his nostrils quivering, my buggy thumping over thank-you-ma'ams, I would not be a city leech for a brown-stone front and a brass name-plate upon my door.

In some such pleasant hooky-hour in spring I had cast, sullenly enough, but was now humming to myself, in tune with Troublesome, when a twig snapped behind the willows. Some cow,

thought I, and kept my eyes upon the stream. Another twig: I turned inquiringly. There, by the water-side, and all unmindful of my presence, was Letitia Primrose.

I bit my pipe clean through. I would have called at once, but something stopped me. She stood quietly by the brook, gazing at the stones on which it played and sang. Her shoulders drooped a little, her face seemed tired and pale. She turned and saw me.

"Bertram!" Her face was guilty.

"Hello!" I said, lighting my pipe.

"You here, Bertram?"

"Yes," I replied, casting again. "How is it you're here? No school, Letitia?"

She hesitated.

"No patients, doctor?" she asked, softly.

"No patients dying," I retorted. We eyed each other.

"I had a headache," she said, meekly, seating herself upon a log. "And I have a substitute."

"There are other doctors," I remarked.

Suddenly she rose.

"I think," she said, "I'll just stroll that way, if you don't mind, Bertram."

"Not at all," I replied. "I know how you feel, Letitia. That's why I come here."

"Do you?" she asked. "Then this isn't your first—"

"Nor my twentieth offence," I replied, laughing. She sighed.

"I'm glad of that. It's my first—really. I feel like a criminal."

I pointed with my broken pipe-stem.

"You'll find the best path there," I said.

"I think I'll stay, if you don't mind, Bertram."

"Stay, by all means," I replied, and went on fishing. Letitia was the first to speak.

"It's hard always trying to be—dominant," she remarked, "isn't it?"

"Why, I rather like it," I replied.

"You are a man," she said. "Men do, I believe. But I, I get so tired sometimes"—she bit her lip—"of being master." She laughed nervously. "That's why I ran away."

Presently she went on speaking.

"If we could only be surrounded by such things as these, always, how serene our lives might be. Don't smile. It's my old sermon of environment, I know; but why are you here?—

and why am I? I try my best to keep the beautiful before my children's eyes, to tempt them into lovely thinking. Bertram, I believe, heart and soul, in the power of beauty. I am so sure of it, I know I should be a stronger teacher if I were young and beautiful myself—or even pretty, like Helen White."

"She is a mere wax doll," I said.

"But children like pretty faces," she replied. "Look! You have a fish!"

It was a snag, but while I was busy with it she rose.

"Wait," I said, "I'll drive you home."

"No, thank you, Bertram. I'd rather walk. My head is better now. Good-bye."

I did not urge her. When she had gone I picked up a slip of paper from the path where she had passed. It was a crumpled half of a blue-ruled leaf torn from some pupil's tablet, and, scrawled upon it in a school-girl's hand, I read:

"DEAR EDNA,—Don't mind the homely old thing. Everybody says she's fifty if she's a day. No one would marry her, so she had to teach school."

It was written, Dove told me afterwards, by one of the rose-girls in Letitia's garden.

VII

PEGGY NEAL

MY aunt Miranda, who was wise in many things, used to maintain that a woman ceased to be charming only when she thought she had ceased to be so; that age had nothing whatever to do with the matter — and so saying, she would smile so bewitchingly upon me that I was forced inevitably to the conclusion that she bore her fifty years much better than many women their paltry score. Letitia was not so sanguine; she laid more stress upon the spring-time. I have heard her say that there was nothing lovelier in the world than a fair young girl full of pure spirits as a rose-cup full of dew. She would turn in the street to look at one; she liked them to be about her; her own face grew more winning in such comradeship, and when she was given a higher school-

room, where the girls wore skirts to their shoe-tops and put up their hair, it was an almost childish pleasure which she displayed. It was this very preference for exquisite maidenhood that explained her fondness for Peggy Neal. It was not scholarship which had won the teacher's heart, for Peggy was an indifferent student, as Letitia herself confessed, but she was a plump and brown-eyed, pink-cheeked country girl who always smiled and who had that grace of innocence and bloom of health which are the witchery of youth. She was a favorite with school-boys, a belle of theirs at straw-rides, dances, and taffy-pulls, and other diversions of our Grassy Fordshire teens, where, however, her gentle ways, her readiness to follow rather than to lead, her utter incapability of envy or spiteful speech made her beloved of girls as well. She was the amiable maiden whom men look twice at, yet whose sisters are never quite jealous, holding her charm to be mere pinkish prettiness and beneath the envy of superior minds like theirs. Peggy was the sort of girl Letitia had never been, roseate with the kind of youth Letitia had never known, and it enchanted her as a joy and beauty which had been denied.

Neal, the father, was a drunken farmer, whose wife was chiefly responsible for the crops they planted, and who, being strong and abler than her shiftless spouse, was usually to be seen in the field and garden directing and aiding the hired man. Peggy was the only child. She helped her mother in the kitchen, fed the chickens, skimmed the milk, sold the butter, and let her father in o' nights. He was a by-word in the village. Occasional revivalists prayed for him publicly upon their knees, but without effect. His wife could have told them how futile that method was; she had tried it herself in more hopeful years. She had tried rage also, but it left her bitter and sick of life, and Pat the drunker; so wisely she had fallen back upon resignation, though not of the apathetic sort, and had made herself mistress of the farm, where her husband was suffered to spend his nights if he chose, or was able to walk so far from the tavern where he apent his days.

For Peggy the mother had better dreams. She knew that the girl was beautifu', and she knew also what beauty, however born, might win for itself in a wider world than her own had been. Peggy, therefore, was to finish school,

however the farm might suffer by her absence and the expense of such simple dress as her village friendships would require. Nature might marry Thrift or Money, thought the hard-faced woman in the faded sunbonnet; silk and lace and a new environment might make a queen of this beggar-maid, her last hope in a life of hopelessness. Proudly she watched her daughter flower into village fame, guarding that fairness with jealous eyes.

"Daughter," she would say, "where is your hat?"

"Mamma, I like the sun."

"Nonsense. Go straight and fetch it and put it on. Do you want to be speckled like your ugly old mother-hen?"

It was a care and pride that would have turned another and far less lovely head than Peggy's, yet in spite of it this country school-girl ripened sweetly. Driving on country visits I used to meet her by the way, walking easily and humming to herself the while, her books and luncheon swinging at her side—a perfect model for romantic painters who run to milk-maids, or, as Letitia used to say, the veritable Phyllis of old English song.

The mother rose at dawn; she toiled by sunlight and by lamplight; her face grew haggard, her figure gaunter, her voice sharper with bitter irony, her heart harder save in that one lone corner which was kept soft—solely for her child. Peggy, I believe, was the only living thing she smiled upon. Neighbors dreaded her cutting tongue; her husband was too dazed to care.

Time went by. In spite of that stern resolve in the woman's nature, and all her labor and frugal scheming, what with the failure of crops and her lack of knowledge of their better care, and an old encumbrance whose interest could be barely met on the quarter-days that cast their shadows on the whole round year, the farm declined. Letitia's gifts from her own wardrobe were all that kept Peggy Neal in school. It was a word from Letitia also that raised the cloud on the mother's face when despair was darkest there. Might not summer-boarders, Letitia asked, bear a surer, more golden harvest than those worn-out fields?

"Summer-boarders!" cried Mrs. Neal, with a grim irony in her voice. But she repeated it—"Summer-boarders," in a milder tone, and the plan was tried.

The first ones came in June. They descended noisily from the fast express, lugging bags and fishing-rods and guns. Some of them stared; some young ones whistled softly at the fair driver of that old two-seated buckboard waiting to bear them to the farm. They greeted effusively—for the daughter's sake—the hard-mouthed woman who met them at the door, striving her best to smile a welcome. She it was who showed them their plain but well-scrubbed chambers, while their minds were at the barn.

Pastures and orchards bore strange fruit that summer: white-faced city clerks in soft, pink shirts smoked cigarettes and browned in the sun; freckled ladies set up their easels in the cow-lot; high-school professors asked one another puzzling questions, balanced cannily on the topmost rail of the Virginia fence, and all—all, that is, to a man—helped Peggy carry in the milk, helped Peggy churn, helped Peggy bake, helped Peggy set the table, and clear it, and wipe the dishes, and set them safely away again in the dim pantry—helped Peggy to market, and Peggy to church: so rose her star.

The mother watched, remembering her own

girlhood. Its romance, seen through a mist of gloomy years, seemed foolish now. There might be happiness in human life—she had never known any. There was a deal of nonsense in the world called love, she knew, and there was a surer thing called money. Peggy should wait for it.

The mother watched, smiling to herself sardonically, secretly well-pleased—smiling because she knew quite well that these callow sprigs had far less money than negligées; well-pleased because she guessed that soon enough a man with both would be hovering about sweet Peggy's dairy. It was a humorous thing to her that all these city men should think it beautiful—that dampish, sunless spot where the milk-cans stood waist-deep in cresses.

She kept sharp eyes upon her daughter, and farm-house duties filled Peggy's days to their very brim. There must be no loitering by starlight, either. Mother and daughter now slept together in the attic store-room, for the new farming had proved a prosperous thing.

The summer was not like other summers. There was life and gayety up at Neal's: strumming of banjos and the sound of laughter and

singing on the porch, much lingering in hammocks under the pine-trees, moonlit jaunts in the old hay-rick, lanterns moving about the barn and dairy, empty bowls on the buttery table when Mrs. Neal came down at dawn, and half-cut loaves in the covered crocks.

September came and the harvest had been gathered in. The last boarder had returned cityward. Peggy was in school again. One day, however, she was missing from her classes, and Letitia, fearing that she might be ill, walked to the farm after school was over. It was a pleasant road with a narrow path beside it among the grasses, and the day was cool with premonitions of the year's decline.

The farm seemed silent and deserted. She knocked at doors, she tapped lightly on the kitchen-windows, but no one was at home. At the barn, however, the horses were in their stalls, turning their heads to her and whinneying of their empty mangers. Surely, she thought, the Neals could not be gone. She stood awhile by the well-curb from which she could better survey the farm: it lay before her, field and orchard, bright with sunshine and golden-rod, yet she saw no moving thing but the crows in

the corn-stubble and the cows waiting by the meadow-bars. Then she tried the dairy, and there heard nothing but the brook whimpering among the cans and cresses, and she turned away.

Now a lane runs, grassy and strewn with the wild blackberry-vines, through the Neal farm to a back road into town, and Letitia chose it to vary her homeward way. It passes first the brook, over a little hoof-worn, trembling bridge, and then the vineyard, where the grapes were purple that autumn evening. There, pausing to regale herself, Letitia heard a strange sound among the trellises. It was a child crying, moaning and sobbing as if its heart would break. For a moment only Letitia listened there; then she ran, fearfully, stumbling in the heavy loam between the rows of vines, to the spot from which the moaning came. She found a girl crouching on the earth.

"Peggy!" she cried, kneeling beside her. "Peggy! Are you hurt? Peggy! Answer me!"

The girl shook her head and shrank away among the lower leaves.

"Oh, what is the matter?" Letitia begged, terrified, and gathered Peggy into her arms. "Tell me! Tell me, sweet!"

"Nothing," was the wretched answer. "Please —please go away!"

But Letitia stayed, brushing the dirt from the girl's dark hair, kissing her, petting her, murmuring the tenderest names, and gently urging her to tell. Peggy raised herself upon her knees, putting both hands to her temples and staring wildly with swollen eyes.

"Mamma's gone in, Miss Primrose," she said, brokenly. "She'll — she'll tell you. Please — please go away!"

She begged so piteously, Letitia rose.

"I'd rather stay, Peggy; but if you wish it—"

"Yes. Please go!"

"I'd rather stay."

"No. Please—"

Slowly, and with many misgivings, Letitia went. She knocked again at the farm-house, but got no answer, as before. She tried the doors—they were locked, all of them. Then her heart reproached her and she hurried back again to the lane. It was growing dusk, and in the vineyard the rows confused her.

"Peggy!" she called, softly.

Her foot touched a basket half-filled with grapes.

"Peggy! Where are you?"

She could hear nothing but the rustling leaves.

"Peggy!" she called. "Peggy!"

There was no answer, but as she listened with a throbbing heart, she heard cows lowing at the pasture-bars — and the click of the farm-yard gate.

VIII

NEW EDEN

LETITIA'S church, the last her father ever preached in, is a little stone St. Paul's, pine-shaded and ivy-grown, upon a hill-side. There are graves about it in the lawn, scattered, not huddled there, and no paths between them, only the soft grass touching the very stones. Above them in the untrimmed boughs swaying with every wind, the wild birds nest and sing, so that death where Dr. Primrose lies seems a pleasant dreaming.

"Our service," he used to say, "is the ancient poetry of reverence;" and every verse of it brings to Letitia memories of her father standing at the lecturn, while she was a child listening in the pews.

"I was very proud of him," she used to tell us. "His sermons were wonderful, I think. You

will say that I could not judge them as a girl and daughter, but I have read them since. I have them all in a box up-stairs, and now and then I take one out and read it to myself, and all that while I can hear his voice. They are better than any I listen to nowadays; they are far more thoughtful, fuller of life and fire and the flower of eloquence. Our ministers are not so brimming any more."

She told us a story I had never heard, of his earnestness and how hard it was for him to find words fervent enough to express his meaning; how when a rich old merchant of Grassy Ford confessed to him a doubt that there was a God, dear Dr. Primrose turned upon him in the village street where they walked together and said, with the tears springing to his eyes:

"Gabriel Bond, not as a clergyman but as a man, I say to you, consider for a moment that apple-bloom you are treading on!" It was spring and a bough from the merchant's garden overhung the walk where they had paused. "Hold it in your hand, and look at it, and think, man, *think!* Use the same reason which tells you two and two make four — the same reason that made you rich, Gabriel—and tell me,

if you can, there is no God! Why, sir—" and here Dr. Primrose's heart quite overcame him, and his voice broke. "Gabriel, you are not such a damned—"

And the merchant, Letitia said, for it was Bond himself who told her the story long after Dr. Primrose's voice was stilled—the merchant, astounded to find a clergyman so like another man struggling for stressful words for his emotion, picked up the bruised twig from beneath his feet and stuck it in her father's coat.

"Doctor," he said, quietly, "there's force, sir, in what you say," and left Dr. Primrose wondering on the walk. But the next Sunday he appeared at church, and every Sunday for many years thereafter, merely explaining to those who marvelled, that he had found a man.

It was not likely that the daughter of such a man would be much troubled with doubts of what he had taught so positively or what she had come to believe herself; if led astray it would be like her sex in general, through too much faith. While not obtrusive in her views of life in her younger years, Letitia, as she reached her prime, and through the habit of self-dependence and her daily duty of instructing undevel-

oped minds, grew more decisive in her manner, more impatient of opposition to what she held was truth, especially when it seemed to her the fruit of ignorance or that spirit of bantering argument so common to the humorously inclined. She liked humor to know its place, she said; it was the favorite subterfuge of persons championing a losing cause. In such discussions, finding her earnestness useless to convince, and scorning to belittle a theme dear to her with resort to jest or personalities, she would sit silenced, but with a flush upon her cheeks, and if the enemy had pressed too sharply on her orderly retreat, one would always know it by the tapping of her foot upon the floor.

She was no mean antagonist. For she read not only those volumes her father loved, but the books and journals of the day as well. Reading and theorizing of the greater world outside her little one, she was not troubled by those paradoxes which men meet there, which cause them to falter, doubt, and see two sides of questions where they had seen but one, till they fall back lazily, taking their ease on that neutral ground where Humor is the host, welcoming all and favoring none. We used to smile sometimes at

Letitia's fervency; we had our little jests at its expense, but we knew it was her father in her, poet and preacher not dead but living still. In his youth and prime Dr. Primrose was ever the champion of needy causes, whose name is legion, so that his zeal found vent, and left him in his decline the mild old poet I remember. Would Letitia be as mild, I wondered?

"A few more needy causes," I used to say, "would soften that tireless spirit—say, stockings to darn and children to dress for school, and a husband to keep in order."

"Yet in lieu of these," Dove once replied, "she has her day's work and her church and books—"

"But are they enough for a woman, do you think?" I asked my wife. We were standing together by Robin's bedside, watching him as he slept. Dove said nothing, but laid her hand against his rose-red cheek.

Little by little we became aware of some subtle change in our Letitia. She took less interest in the mild adventures of our household world. She smiled more faintly at my jests, a serious matter, for I have at home, like other men, some reputation for a pretty wit upon

occasion. It was a mild estrangement and recluseness. She sat more often in her room up-stairs. She was absent frequently on lonely walks, sometimes at evening, and brought home a face so rapt, and eyes with a look in them so far away from our humble circle about the reading-lamp, we deemed it wiser to ask no questions. For years it had been an old country custom of ours, when we sat late, to seek the pantry before retiring, but now when invited to join us in these childish spreads, "No, thank you," Letitia would reply, and in a tone so scrupulously courteous I used to feel like the man old Butters told about—a poor, inadvertent wight, he was, who had offered a sandwich to an angel. I forget now how the story runs, but the man grumbled at his rebuff, and so did I.

"I know, my dear," Dove reproved me, "but you ought not to do such things when you see she's thinking."

"Thinking!" I cried, cooling my temper in bread-and-milk. "Is it thinking, then?"

"I don't know what it is," Dove sighed. "She isn't Letitia any more, yet for the life of me I can't tell why. I never dream now of

disturbing her when she looks that way, and I cannot even talk to her as I used to do."

"She isn't well," I said.

"She says she was never better."

"She may be troubled."

"She says she was never happier."

"Well, then," I decided, sagely, "it must be thinking, as you say."

We agreed to take no notice of what might be only moody crotchets after all; they would soon pass. We no longer pressed her to join our diversions about the lamp, but welcomed her in the old spirit when she came willingly or of her own accord. Yet even then it was not the same: there was some mute, mysterious barrier to the old, free, happy intercourse. Some word of Dove's or mine, mere foolery, perhaps, but meant in cheerfulness, would dance out gayly across the table where we sat at cards, but slink back home again, disgraced. What could this discord be? we asked ourselves — this strange impassiveness, this disapproval, as it seemed to us—negative, but no less obvious for that?"

There was a heaviness in the air. We breathed more freely in Letitia's absence. We grew self-conscious in that mute, accusing presence, which

I resented and my wife deplored. Dove even confessed to a feeling of guiltiness, yet could remember no offence.

"What have I done?" I asked my wife.

"What have *I* done?" asked she.

At meals, especially, we were ill at ease. The very viands, even those famous dishes of Dove's own loving handiwork, met with disfavor instead of praise. Letitia had abandoned meats; now she declined Dove's pies! Pastry was innutritious, she declared, meats not intended for man at all, and even of green things she ate so mincingly that my little housewife was in despair.

"What can I get for you, dear?" she would ask, anxiously. "What would you like?"

"My love," Letitia would reply, flushing with annoyance, "I am perfectly satisfied."

"But I'll get you anything, Letitia."

"I eat quite enough, my dear," was the usual answer—"quite enough," she would add, firmly, "for any one."

Then Dove would sink back ruefully, and I, pitying my wife—I, rebuked but unabashed and shameless in my gluttony, would pass my plate again.

"Give me," I would say, cheerfully, "a *third*

piece of that excellent, that altogether heavenly cherry-pie, my dear."

It may sound like triumph, but was not—for Letitia Primrose would ignore me utterly. "Have you read," she would ask, sipping a little water from her glass, "*New Eden*, by Mrs. Lord?"

We still walked mornings to the school-house, still talked together as we walked, but not as formerly—not of the old subjects, which was less to be wondered at, nor yet of new ones with the old eloquence. I felt constrained. There was a new note in Letitia's comments on the way the world was going, though I could not define its pitch. She spoke, I thought, less frankly than of old, but much more carelessly. She seemed more listless in her attitude towards matters that had roused her, heart and soul, in other days. Me she ignored at pleasure; could it be possible, I wondered, that she was determined to renounce the whole round world as well?

It was I who had first resented this alienation, but it was Dove who could not be reconciled to a change so inscrutable and unkind. Time, I argued, was sufficient reason; age, I reminded her, cast strange shadows before its coming;

our friend was growing old—perhaps like her father — before her time. But Dove was alarmed: Letitia was pale, she said; her face was wan—there was a drawn look in the lines of the mouth and eyes; even her walk had lost its buoyancy.

"True," I replied, "but even that is not unnatural, my dear. Besides, she eats nothing; she starves herself."

My wife rose suddenly.

"Bertram," she said, earnestly, "you must stop this folly. I have tried my best to tempt her out of it, but I have failed. It is you she is fondest of. It is you who must speak."

"I fear it will do no good," I answered, "but I will try." I have had use for courage in my lifetime, both as doctor and man, but I here confess to a trembling of the heart-strings, a childish faintness, a lily cowardice in these encounters, these trifling domestic sallies and ambuscades. Nor have I strategy; I know but one method of attack, and its sole merit is the little time it wastes.

"Letitia," I said, next morning, as we walked townward, "you are ill."

"Nonsense, Bertram," she replied.

"You are ill," I replied, firmly. "You are pale as a ghost. Your hands tremble. Your walk—"

"I was never stronger in my life," she interposed, and as if she had long expected this little crisis and was prepared for it. "Never, I think, have I felt so tranquil, so serene. My mind—"

"I am not speaking of your mind," I said. "I am talking of your body."

"Bertram," she said, excitedly, "that is just your error — not yours alone, but the whole world's error. This thinking always of earthly—"

"Now, Letitia," I protested, "I have been a doctor—"

"Illness," she continued, "is a state of mind. To think one is ill, is to be ill, of course, but to think one is well, is to be well, as I am—well, I mean, in a way I never dreamed of!—a way so sure, so beautiful, that I think sometimes I never knew health before."

"Letitia," I said, sharply, "what nonsense is this?"

"It is not nonsense," she retorted. "It is living truth. Oh, how can we be so blind! The body, Bertram—why, the body is nothing!"

"Nothing!" I cried.

"Nothing!" she answered, her face glowing. "The body is nothing; the mind is everything! It is God's great precious gift! With my mind I can control my body—my life—yes, my very destiny!—if I use God's gift of Will. It is divine."

"Letitia," I said, sternly, "those are fine words, and well enough in their time and place. I am not a physician of souls. I mend worn bodies, when I can. It is yours I am thinking of—the frail, white, half-starved flesh and blood where your soul is kept."

"Stop!" she cried. "You have no right to speak that way. You mean well, Bertram, but you are wrong. You are mistaken—terribly mistaken," she repeated, earnestly—"terribly mistaken. I am quite, quite able to care for myself. I only ask to be let alone."

She had grown hysterical. Tears were in her eyes.

"See," she said, in a calmer tone, wiping them away, "I have had perfect control till now. This is not weakness merely; it is worse: it is sin. But I shall show you. I shall show you a great truth, Bertram, if you will let me. Only have patience, that is all."

She smiled and paused in a little common near the school-house where none might hear us.

"I learned it only recently," she told me. "I cannot see how I never thought of it before: this great power mind has over matter—how just by the will which God has given us in His goodness, we may rise above these petty, earthly things which chain us down. We can rise *here*, Bertram—here on earth, I mean—and when we do, even though our feet be on Grassy Fordshire ground, we walk in a higher sphere. Ah, can't you see then that nothing can ever touch us? —nothing earthly, however bitter, can ever sadden us or spoil our lives! There will be no such thing as disappointment; no regret, no death—and earth will be Eden come again."

Her eyes were shining.

"Letitia," I said, "it is of another world that you are dreaming."

"No, it is all quite possible here," she said. "It is possible to you, if you only think so. It is possible for me, because I do."

"It seems," I said, "a monstrous selfishness."

"Selfishness!" she said, aghast.

"As long as you have human eyes," I said, "you will see things to make you weep, Letitia."

"But if I shut them—if I rise above these petty—"

"The sound of crying will reach your ears," I said. "How then shall you escape sadness and regret? What right have you to avoid the burdens your fellows bear?—to be in bliss, while they are suffering? It would be monstrous, Letitia Primrose. You would not be woman: You would be a fiend."

She shook her head.

"You don't understand," she said.

"At least," I answered, "I will send you something from the office."

She shut her lips.

"I shall not take it."

"It will make you stronger," I insisted.

"You can do nothing," she answered, coldly, "to make me stronger than I am."

IX

A SERIOUS MATTER

IF ever woman had a tender heart, that heart was Dove's. I used to say, to her confusion, that a South Sea cannibal might find confessional in her gentle ear, were his voice but low enough; that she might draw back, shuddering at his tales of the bones he had picked, but if only his tears were real ones, I could imagine her, when he had done, putting her hand upon his swarthy shoulder and saying, earnestly:

"I know just how you feel!"

Such was the woman Letitia confided in, now that her tongue was loosened and the mystery solved, for her soul was brimming with those new visions—dreams so roseate as she painted them that my wife listened with their wonder mirrored in her round brown eyes, and dumb before that eloquence. Dove loved Letitia as

a greater woman than herself, she said, worshipped her for her wider knowledge and more fluent speech, just as she wondered at it ruefully as a girl on Sun Dial listening to Letitia's tales of dryads and their spells. In return for all this rapt attention and modest reverence, Letitia formerly had been grace itself. It was a tender tyranny she had exercised; but now?—how should my simple, earthly Dove, mother and housewife, confide any longer her favorite cares, her gentle fears, her innocent regrets? With what balm of sympathy and cheer would the new Letitia heal those wounds? Would not their very existence be denied; or worse, be held as evidence of sin?—iniquity in my poor girl's soul, hidden there like a worm i' the bud, and to be chastened in no wise save by taking invisible white wings of thought, and soaring—God knows where?

The new Letitia was not unamiable, nor yet unkind, knowingly, for she smiled consistently upon all about her—a strange, aloof, unloving smile though, at which we sighed. We should have liked her to be heart and soul again in our old-time common pleasures, even to have joined us now and then in a fault or two—to have

looked less icily, for example, upon our occasional petty gossip of our neighbors, or to have added one wrathful word to our little rages at the way the world was straying from the golden mist we had seen it turn in, in our youth. As we watched her, wondering, laughing sometimes, sometimes half-angry at this new and awful guise she had assumed, it would come to us, not so much how sadly earthen we must seem to her, nor yet how strange and daft and airy her new views seemed to us in our duller sight—but how the old Letitia whom we had loved was gone forever.

"Bertram," said my wife one evening as we sat together by the lamp, "what do you think Letitia says?"

"I am prepared for anything, my dear."

Dove, who was sewing, laid down her work and said, gravely:

"She does not believe in marriage any more."

I raised my eyebrows. There was really nothing to be said.

"At least," my wife went on, resuming her sewing, "she says that the time will come when the race will have"—Dove paused thoughtfully —"risen above such things, I think she said. I

really don't remember the words she used, but I believe—yes, there *will* be marriage—in a way—that is"—Dove knitted her brows—"a union of kindred souls, if I understand her."

"Ah!" I replied. "I see. But what about the perpetuation—"

My wife shook her head.

"Oh, all that will be done away with, I believe," she said, gravely.

"Done away with!" I cried.

"At least," Dove explained, "it will not be necessary."

My face, I suppose, may have looked incredulous.

"I don't quite comprehend what Letitia says sometimes," my wife explained, "but to-day she was telling me—"

Dove laughed quaintly.

"Oh, I forget what comes next," she said, "but Letitia told me all about it this morning."

I returned to my quarterly. Presently my wife resumed:

"She has four books about it."

"Only four!" I said. "I should think one would need a dozen at least to explain such mysteries."

"She says herself she is only at the beginning," Dove replied. "She's now in the first circle—or cycle, I've forgotten which—but the more she reads and the more she thinks about it, the more wonderful it grows. Oh, there was something else—what was it now she called it?—something about the—cosmos, I think she said, but I didn't quite grasp the thing at all."

"I'm surprised," I replied. "It's very simple."

"I suppose it is," Dove answered, quickly, and so humbly that I laughed, but she looked up at me with such a quivering smile, I checked myself. "I suppose it *is* simple," she replied. "I guess my mind—is not very strong, Bertram. I—I find it so hard to understand some—"

I saw the tears were coming.

"Don't trouble yourself about such things, my dear," I said, cheerfully. "It's a bonny mind you have, you take my word for it."

Dove wiped her eyes.

"No," she said; "when I listen to Letitia, I feel like a—"

"There, there, my dear," I said, "you have things a thousand times more vital and useful and beautiful than this cosmos Letitia talks

about. It's only another word for the universe, my love, if I remember rightly—I'm not quite sure myself, but it doesn't matter. It's easy to pronounce, and it may mean something, or it may mean nothing, but we needn't trouble ourselves about it, little one. You have work to do. You must remember Letitia has no such ties to bind her to the simple things, which are enough for most of us to battle with. I am tired of theories myself, dear heart. Work—everyday, humble, loving service is all that keeps life normal and people pleasant to have about. I see so much of this other side, it is always good to come home to you."

I went back to my medical journal—I forgot to say I had come around to my wife's side of our reading-table in settling this perplexing matter; I went back to my work, and she to hers, and we finished the evening very quietly, and in as good health and unruffled spirits as the cosmos itself must enjoy, I think, judging from the easy way it has run on, year after year, age after age, since the dark beginning.

PART III

Rosemary

I

THE HOME-KEEPER

THE years slip by so quietly in Grassy Ford that men and women born here find themselves old, they scarce know how, for are they not still within sound of the brooks they fished in, and in the shadow of the very hill-sides they climbed for butternuts, when they were young? The brooks run on so gayly as before, and why not they as well?

"Butters," Shears used to grumble, "never could learn that he was old enough to stop his jawing and meddling around the town, till they dug his grave for him; then he shut up fast enough."

"Well, then," said Caleb Kane, another character, "we'll sure enough have to send for the sexton."

Colonel Shears eyed Caleb with suspicion,

"What for?" he asked.

"Why, to get a word in edgewise, Sam'l," Caleb replied, and the Colonel rose, shifted his cigar, and sauntered homeward.

"Mostly comedies," said the one we call Johnny Keats, when I urged him to write the stories of his native town; yet, as I told him, there are tragedies a-plenty too in Grassy Fordshire, though the dagger in them is a slower torture than the short swift stab men die of in a literary way. Our heroic deaths are done by inches, as a rule, so imperceptibly, so often with jests and smiles in lieu of fine soliloquies, that our own neighbors do not always know how rare a play the curtain falls on sometimes among our hills.

If I do not die in harness, if, as I often dream of doing, I turn my practice over to some younger man—perhaps to Robin, who shows some signs of following in his father's steps—I shall write the story of my native town; not in the old way, embellished, as Butters would have termed it, with family photographs of the leading citizens and their houses and cow-sheds, and their wooden churches, and their corner stores with the clerks and pumpkins in array before them—not

in that old, time-honored, country manner, but in the way it comes to me as I look backward and think of the heroes and heroines and the clowns and villains I have known. I shall need something to keep me from "jawing and meddling around the town"; why not white paper and a good stub pen, while I smoke and muse of my former usefulness. I suppose I shall never write the chronicle; Johnny Keats could, if he would; and I would, if I could—thus the matter rests, while the town and its tales and I myself grow old together. Even Johnny Keats, who was a boy when Letitia taught in the red brick schoolhouse, has a thin spot in his hair.

Had Dove but lived—it is idle, I know, to say what might have been, had our Grassy Fordshire been the same sweet place it was, before she went like other white birds—"southward," she said, "but only for a winter, Bertram—surely spring comes again."

This I do know: that I should have had far less to tell of Letitia Primrose, who might have gone on mooning of a better world had Dove not gone to one, leaving no theories but a son and husband to Letitia's care. It was not to the oracle that she intrusted us, but to the woman—

not to the new Letitia but to the old, who had come back to us in those vigils at my wife's bedside.

"This is not sin, Letitia," Dove said to her.

"Oh, my dear!" replied Letitia. "You must not dream that I could call it so."

"Still," Dove answered, "if I had your mind, perhaps—"

"Hush, dear love," Letitia whispered. "My sweet, my sweet—oh, if I had your soul!"

From such chastening moments Letitia Primrose was the mother she might have been. A tenderer, humbler heart, save only Dove's, I never knew, nor a gentler voice, nor a stronger hand, than those she gave us, man and boy bereft—not only in those first blank days, but through the years that followed. So easily that I marvelled did the school-mistress become the home-keeper, nor can I look upon a spinster now, however whimsical, that I do not think of her as the elder sister of that wife and mother in her soul.

A new dream possessed Letitia: it was to be like Dove. She could never be youthful save in spirit; she could never be lovely with that subtle poise and grace which cannot be feigned

or purchased at any price, neither with gold nor patience nor purest prayer nor any precious thing whatever, but comes only as a gift to the true young mother at her cradle-side. She could not be one-half so perfect, she confessed humbly to herself, but she could keep the fire blazing on a lonely hearth, where a man sat silent with his child.

My girl's housewifeliness had seemed a simple matter when Letitia's mind was on her school and sky; it was now a marvel as she learned what Dove had done — those thousand little things, and all so easily, so placidly, that at the day's fag-end Letitia, weary with unaccustomed cares, wondered what secret system of philosophy Dove's had been. What were the rules and their exceptions? What were the formulæ? Here were sums to do, old as the hills, but strange, new answers! There must be a grammar for all that fluency, that daily smoothness in every clause and phrase—a kind of eloquence, as Letitia saw it now, marvelling at it as Dove had marvelled at her own. When she had solved it, as she thought, the steak went wrong, or the pudding failed her, or the laundry came home torn or incomplete, moths perhaps got into

closets, ants stormed the pantry, or a pipe got stopped; and then, discomfited, she would have Dove's magic and good-humored mastery to seek again.

She had kept house once herself, it is true, but years ago, for her simple father, and not in Dove's larger way. The Primrose household as she saw it now had been a meagre one, for here in the years of Dove's gentle rule, a wondrous domestic ritual had been established, which it was now her duty to perform. That she did it faithfully, so that the windows shone and the curtains hung like snowy veils behind them, so that the searching light of day disclosed no film upon the walnut, who could doubt, knowing that conscience and its history? She kept our linen neatly stitched; she set the table as Dove had set it; she poured out tea for us more primly, to be sure, but cheerfully as Dove had poured it, smiling upon us from Dove's chair.

Robin grew straight of limb and wholesome of soul as Dove had dreamed. Letitia helped him with his lessons, told him the legends of King Arthur's court, and read with him those *Tales of a Grandfather*, which I had loved as just such another romping boy—though not so handsome

and debonair as Dove's son was, for he had her eyes and her milder, her more poetic face, and was more patrician in his bearing; he is like his mother to this day. His temper, which is not maternal, I confess—those sudden gusts when, as I before him, he chafed in bonds and cried out bitter things, rose hotly sometimes at Letitia's discipline, though he loved her doubly now.

"You are not my mother!" he would shout, clinching his fists. "You are not my mother!"

Then her heart would fail her, for she loved him fondly, even in his rage, and her penalty would be mild indeed. Often she blamed herself for his petty waywardness, and feeling her slackening hand he would take the bit between his teeth, coltlike; but he was a good lad, Robin was, and, like his mother, tender-hearted, for all his spirit, and as quick to be sorry as to be wrong. When they had made it up, crying in each other's arms, Letitia would say to him:

"I'm not your mother, but I love you, and I've got no other little boy."

It was thus Letitia kept our home for us, tranquil and spotless as of old; and if at first I chose more often than was kind to sit rather

among my bottles and my books and instruments, leaving her Robin and the evening-lamp, it was through no fault or negligence of hers I did it, for, however bright my hearth might glow, however tended by her gentle hands, its flame was but the ruddy symbol to me of a past whose spirit never could return.

"Who *is* Miss Primrose?" strangers in Grassy Ford would ask.

"She's a sort of relative," the reply would be, "and the doctor's house-keeper."

For the woman who keeps still sacred and beautiful another woman's home, in all the language, in all our wordiness, there is no other name.

II

JOHNNY KEATS

THE one we call Johnny Keats is well enough known as Karl St. John. He was a Grassy Fordshire boy and Letitia's pupil, as I have said, till he left us, only to like us better, as he once told me, by seeing the world beyond our hills. He went gladly, I should say, judged by the shining in his eyes. He was a homely, slender, quiet lad, except when roused, when he was vehement and obstinate enough, and somewhat given, I am told, to rhapsody and moonshine. He read much rather than studied as a school-boy, and was seen a good deal on Sun Dial and along Troublesome where he never was known to fish, but wandered aimlessly, wasting, it was said, a deal of precious time which might have been bettered in his father's shop. Letitia liked him for a cer-

tain brightness in his face when she talked of books, or of other things outside the lessons; otherwise he was not what is termed in Grassy Ford a remarkable boy. We have lads who "speak pieces" and "accept," as we say it, "lucrative" positions in our stores.

Karl drifted off when barely twenty, and as time went by was half forgotten by the town, when suddenly the news came home to us that he had written, and what is sometimes considered more, had published, and with his own name on the title-page, a novel!—*Sleepington Fair*, the thing was called. There are those who say Sleepington Fair means Grassy Ford, and that the river which the hero loved, and where he rescued a maid named Hilda from an April flood, is really our own little winding Troublesome, widened and deepened to permit the well-nigh tragic ending of the tale. You can wade Troublesome; Hilda went in neck-deep. They say also that the man McBride, who talks so much, is our old friend Colonel Shears; the fanciful McBride is tall in fact, and the actual Shears is tall in fancy. Be that as it may, the book was excellent, considering that it was written by a Grassy Fordshire boy, and it set at least two

others of our lads, and a lady, I believe, to scribbling—further deponent sayeth not.

Sleepington Fair was read by the ladies of the Longfellow Circle, our leading literary club. Our Mrs. Buhl, acknowledged by all but envious persons to be the most cultured woman in Grassy Ford, pronounced it safely "one of the most pleasing and promising novels of the past decade," and, in concluding her critical review before the club, she said, smilingly: "From Mr. St. John—*our* Mr. St. John, for let me call him so, since surely he is ours to claim—from our Mr. St. John we may expect much, and I feel that I am only voicing the sentiments of the Longfellow Circle when I wish for him every blessing of happiness and health, that his facile pen may through the years to come trace only what is pure and noble, and that when, as they will, the shadows lengthen, and his sun descends in the glowing west, he may say with the poet—"

What the poet said I have forgotten, but the words of Mrs. Buhl brought tears to the eyes of many of her auditors, who, at the meeting's close, pressed about her with out-stretched hands, assuring her that she had quite outdone herself and that never in their lives had they heard

anything more scholarly, anything more thoughtfully thought or more touchingly said. Would she not publish it, she was asked, pleadingly? No? It was declared a pity. It was a shame, they said, that she had never written a book herself, she who could write so charmingly of another's.

"Ladies! Ladies!" murmured Mrs. Buhl, much affected by this ovation, but her modest protest was drowned utterly in a chorus of—

"Yes, indeed!"

Sleepington Fair aroused much speculation as to its author's rise in the outer world, chiefly with reference to the money he must be making, the sum being variously estimated at from five to twenty-five thousand a year.

"Too low," said Shears. "Suppose he makes half a dollar on every book, and suppose he sells —well, say he sells one hundred thousand—"

"One hundred thousand!" cried Caleb Kane. "Go wan!"

"Why, darn your skin," said Colonel Shears, "why not? *The Old Red Barn* sold *five* hundred thousand, and only out two years. Saw it myself in the paper, the other day."

"No!"

"I say *yes!* Five hundred thousand, by cracky!"

"Oh, well," said Caleb, "that thing was written by a different cuss."

When it was learned one morning that Karl had returned under cover of night for a visit to Grassy Ford, those who had known the boy looked curiously to see what manner of man he had become. And, lo! he was scarcely a man at all, but a beardless youth, no laurel upon his head, no tragic shadow on his brow!—a shy figure flitting down the long main street, darting into stores and out again, and nodding quickly, and hurrying home again as fast as his legs would take him—to dodge a caller even there and wander, thankful for escape, on the banks of Troublesome.

"Well, you 'ain't changed much," said Colonel Shears, when he met the author.

"No," said Karl.

"Look just as peaked as ever," was the cheerful greeting of Caleb Kane.

"Yes," said Karl.

"Don't seem a day older," said Grandma Smith.

"No?" said Karl.

"Why, Karl," said Shears, "I thought you'd change; thought you'd look different, somehow! Yes, sir, I thought you'd look different—but, I swan, you don't!"

"No," said Karl, and there was such honest chagrin in the faces of those old-time friends, he was discomfited. What had they expected, he asked at home?

"Why," said his mother, "don't you know? Can't you guess, my dear? They looked at least for a Prince-Albert and a stove-pipe hat."

"Silk hat! Prince-Albert!"

"Why, yes," said his father. "The outward and visible sign of the soul within."

Karl's clothes, it is true, were scarcely the garb to be hoped for in so marked a man. The dandies of Grassy Ford noted complacently that his plain, gray, wrinkled suit did not compare for style and newness with their own, while they wore at their throats the latest cravats of emerald and purple loveliness. Karl's tie was black, and a plain and pinless bow which drooped dejectedly. His hat was a mere soft, weather-beaten, shapeless thing, and he walked on Sunday with gloveless hands. Miss Johnson, a reigning

belle, tells how he once escorted her from the post-office to her father's gate, talking of Wordsworth all the way, and all unconscious of the Sun Dial burrs still clinging to his coat!

Letitia, for one, declared that she was not disappointed in the author of *Sleepington Fair*. In honor of her old pupil she gave a dinner, and spent such thought upon its menu and took such pains with its service, lest it should offend a New-Yorker's epicurean eye, it is remembered still, and not merely because it was the only literary dinner Grassy Ford has known. There was some agitation among the invited guests as to the formality involved in a dinner to a lion—even though that lion might be seen commonly with burrs in his tail. The pride and honor of Grassy Ford was at stake, and the matter was the more important as the worthy fathers of the town seldom owned dress-suits in those days. For a time, I believe, when I was a boy, Mr. Jewell, the banker, was the sole possessor, and became thereby, no less than by virtue of the manners which accompany the occasional wearing of so suave a garment in so small a town—our first real gentleman. In his case, however, the ownership was the less surprising

in that he was known to enjoy New York connections, on his mother's side.

Now, to those who consulted Letitia as to the precise demands of the approaching feast, she explained, gracefully, that they would be welcome in any dress—adding, however, for the gentlemen's benefit, and hopefully no doubt, for she had the occasion in heart and hand, that the conventional garb after six o'clock was a coat with tails. As a result of the conference two guests-to-be might have been seen through a tailor's window, standing coatless and erect upon a soap-box, much straighter than it was their wont to stand, much fuller of chest, robin-like, and with hips thrown neatly back — to match, as the Colonel said. Two other gentlemen of the dinner-party told their wives bluntly that they would go "*as* usual," or they would be — not go at all, before which edicts their dames salaamed.

Letitia counted on five dress-suits, at least, including the author's and my own. Mine I must wear, she said, or she would be shamed forever; so I put it on when the night arrived, wormed my way cautiously into its outgrown folds, only to find then, to my pain, that an up-

right posture alone could preserve its dignity and mine.

The hour arrived, and with it the Buxtons, old friends and neighbors; Dr. Jamieson, homœopathic but otherwise beyond reproach, and Miss Jamieson, his daughter, who could read Browning before breakfast, much, I suppose, as some robust men on empty stomachs smoke strong cigars; the Gallowses, not wanted overmuch, but asked to keep the white wings of peace hovering in our hills; the Jewells, and some one I've forgotten, and then the Buhls—Mr. Buhl smiling, but unobtrusive to the ear, Mrs. Buhl radiant and gracious, and pervading the assemblage with a dowagerial rustling of lavender silk. To my mind the quieter woman in the plain black gown adorned only by an old-lace collar and antique pin, her hair the whiter for her cheeks now rosy with agitation, her eyes shining with the joy of the first great function she had ever given, was the loveliest figure among them all.

Last came two plain, unassuming folk, though proud enough of that only son of theirs, and then—

"*Oh!*" cries Mrs. Buhl, so suddenly, so ec-

statically that the hum ceases and every head is turned. "*Mister* St. John!"

It is indeed the author of *Sleepington Fair.* And behold the lion!—a slight and faltering figure, pausing upon the threshold, burrless indeed, but oh!—in that old sack suit of gray!

Letitia bore the shock much better than might be expected. She changed color, it is true, but the flush came back at once, and, standing loyally at his side, she led the lion into the room.

It was a trying moment. He was an Author —he had written a Book—but we were thirteen to his one, and four dress-suits besides! Thirteen to one, if you omit his parents, and four dress-shirts, remember, bulging and crackling before his dazzled eyes! New York wavered and fell back, and the first skirmish was Grassy Ford's.

At the same instant it was whispered anxiously in my ear that the ices had not arrived, but I counselled patience, and dinner was proclaimed without delay. The lion and Letitia led the procession to the feast, and I have good reason for the statement that he was a happier lion when we were seated and he had put his legs away. Still, even then he could scarcely be called at ease. Once only did he talk as if he

loved his theme, and then it was solely with Letitia, who had mentioned Troublesome, out of the goodness of her heart, as I believe. His face lighted at the name, and he talked so gladly that all other converse ceased. What was the lion roaring of so gently there? Startled to hear no other voices, he stopped abruptly, and, seeing our curious faces all about him, dropped his eyes, abashed, and kept them on his plate. Then Mrs. Buhl, famous in such emergencies, came to the rescue.

"Oh, Mr. St. John," she said, while we all sat listening, "I've wanted to ask you: how did you come to write *Sleepington Fair?*"

"Oh," he replied, reddening, "I—I wanted to—that was all."

"I see," she replied.

"Do you like 'Sordello'?" asked Miss Jamieson, in the awkward silence that ensued.

"Well, really—I cannot say; I have never read it," was his confession.

"Not read 'Sordello'!"

"No."

"Let's see, that's Poe, isn't it?" asked a young dress-shirt, swelling visibly, emboldened to the guess by the lion's discomfiture.

"Robert Browning," replied the lady, with a look of scorn, and the dress-shirt sank again.

"New York is a great place, isn't it?" volunteered Jimmy Gallows.

"Yes," said the lion.

"Been up the Statue of Liberty, I suppose?" Jimmy went on.

"No," said the lion.

"What!" cried the chorus. "Never been up the—"

"What did he say?" asked Mrs. Jewell, who was deaf. Mr. Buxton solemnly inclined his lips to her anxious ear and shouted:

"*He has never been up the Statue of Liberty.*"

"Oh!" said the lady.

The silence was profound.

"What, *never?*" piped Jimmy Gallows.

"Never," said the lion, shaking his mane a little ominously. "I have never been a tourist."

Letitia mentioned Sun Dial, and would have saved the day, I think, had not Mrs. Buhl leaned forward with the sweetest of alluring smiles.

"Oh, Mr. St. John," she said, "I've been going to ask you—in fact, for a long, long time I have wanted to know, and I wonder now if you won't tell me: how do authors"—she paused sig-

nificantly—"how do authors get their books accepted?"

A dress-shirt crackled, but was frowned upon.

"What did he say?" asked the lady who was deaf.

"*He hasn't said anything yet,*" roared Mr. Buxton.

"Oh!"

"Do tell us," urged Mrs. Buhl. "Do, Mr. St. John. I almost called you Karl."

"Was it a conundrum?" inquired the deaf lady, perceiving that it had been a poser.

"*No. Question: how do authors get their books accepted?*"

"Yes—how do they?" urged Mrs. Buhl.

"Why," said the lion at last, for all the table hung upon his answer, "by writing them well enough—I suppose."

It was a weak answer. There was no satisfaction in it, no meat, no pith at all, nothing to carry home with you. Mrs. Buhl said, "Oh!"

"To what, then," piped Jimmy Gallows, "do you attribute your success?"

He was a goaded lion, one could see quite plainly; the strain was telling on his self-control.

"It is not worth mentioning, Mr. Gallows," he replied, stiffly.

"Mr. St. John," Letitia interposed, in a quiet voice, "was just now telling me that there is no music in all New York to compare with Troublesome's. Shall we go into the other room?"

That night, when the last guest had departed, I asked Letitia, "Well, what do you think of the author?"

"*I* am not disappointed," she replied.

"Not much of a talker, though?" I suggested.

"He does not pretend to be a talker," she replied, warmly. "He is a writer. No," she repeated, "I am not disappointed in my Johnny Keats."

Next day, I think it was, in the afternoon, he asked Letitia to walk with him to the banks of Troublesome, to a spot which she had praised the night before. His heart was full, and as they lingered together by those singing waters he told her of his struggles in the city whose statue he had never climbed. He told her of his black days there, of his failure and despondency, of his plans to leave it and desert his dreams, but how that mighty, roaring, dragon creature

had held him pinioned in its claws till he had won.

"And then," he told her, "when I saw my book, I looked again, and it was not a dragon which had held me—it was an angel!"

Seeing that her eyes were full of tears, he added, earnestly:

"Miss Primrose, I wanted you to know. You had a part in that little triumph."

"I?"

"You. Don't you remember? Don't you remember those books you left for us?—in our old school-room?—on the shelf?"

III

THE FORTUNE-TELLER

UTUMN comes early in Grassy Fordshire. In late September the nights are chill and a white mist hovers ghostly in the moonlight among our hills. The sun dispels it and warms our noons to a summer fervor, but there is no permanence any longer in heat or cold, or leaf or flower—all is change and passing and premonition, so that the singing poet in you must turn philosopher and hush his voice, seeing about him the last sad rites of those little lives once blithe and green as his own was in the spring.

Ere October comes there are crimson stains upon the woodlands. "God's plums, father!" Robin cried, standing as a little boy on Sun Dial and pointing to the distant hills. A spell is over them, a purple and enchanted sleep,

though all about them the winds are wakeful, and the sumac fire which blazed up crimson in the sun but a moment gone, burns low in the shadow of white clouds scudding before the gale. Here beneath them the bloom of the golden-rod is upon the land; fieldsful and lanesful, it bars your way, or brushes your shoulders as you pass. Only the asters, white and purple and all hues between, vie here and there with the mightier host, but its yellow plumes nod triumph on every crest, banks and hedgerows glow with its soldiery, it beards the forest, and even where the plough has passed posts its tall sentries at the furrow's brim.

In the lower meadows there is still a coverlet of summer green, but half hidden in the taller, rusting grasses, whose feathery tops ripple in the faintest wind, till suddenly it rises and whips them into waves, now ruddy, now flashing silver, while a foam of daisies beats against the gray stone hedges like waters tumbling on a quay.

There is cheerful fiddling in these dying grasses, and crickets scuttle from beneath your feet; there is other music too—a shrill snoring as of elder fairies oversleeping; startled insects leap upon you, flocks of sparrows flee from interrupted

feasts, squirrels berate you, crows spread horrid tales of murder stalking in the fields.

Then leave the uplands—tripping on its hidden creepers; part the briers of the farthest hedge-row, and descend, Down in the valley there is a smell of apples in the air, pumpkins glow among the wigwams of the Indian-corn, and deeper still runs Troublesome among the willows, shining silver in the waning sun. There in the sopping lowlands they are harvesting the last marsh hay. A road leads townward, the vines scarlet on its tumbling walls; the air grows cooler—

"Oh, it is beautiful!" says Letitia, sadly—"but it is fall."

I observe in her always at this season an unusual quietness. She is in the garden as early as in the summer-time, and while it is still dripping with heavy dew, for she clings tenderly to its last flowers—to her nasturtiums, to the morning-glories on the trellis, and the geraniums and dahlias and phlox and verbenas along the path; but she gives her heart to her petunias, and because, she says, they are a homely, old-fashioned flower, whom no one loves any more. As she caresses them, brushing the drops from their plain, sweet faces, she seems, like them, to

belong to some bygone, simpler time. Some think her an odd, quaint figure in her sober gown, but they never knew the girl Letitia, or they would see her still, even in this elder woman with the snow-white hair.

Every fall gypsies camp in the fields near Troublesome on their way southward. It is the same band, Letitia tells me, that has stopped there year after year, and Letitia knows: she used to visit them when she was younger and still had a fortune to be told. It was a weakness we had not suspected. She had never acknowledged a belief in omens or horoscopes, or prophecies by palms or dreams, though she used to say fairies were far more likely than people thought. She had seen glades, she told us, lawn or meadow among encircling trees, where, long after sundown, the daylight lingered in a fairy gloaming; and there, she said, when the fire-flies danced, she had caught such glimpses of that elf-land dear to childhood, she had come to believe in it again. There was such a spot among our maples, and from the steps where we used to sit, we would watch the afterglow pale there to the starlit dusk, or that golden glory of the rising moon break upon the shadowy

world, crowning the tree-tops and quenching the eastern stars. Then, sometimes, Dove and Letitia would talk of oracles and divination and other strange inexplicable things which they had heard of, or had known themselves; but Letitia never spoke of the gypsy band till three giggling village maids, half-fearful and half-ashamed of their stealthy quest, found their school-mistress among the vans! She flushed, I suppose, and made the best of a curious matter, for she said, simply, when we charged her with the story that had spread abroad:

"They are English gypsies, and wanderers like the Primroses from their ancient home. That is why they fascinate me, I suppose."

How often she consulted them, or when she began or ceased to do so, I do not know, but when I showed her the vans by the willows and the smoke rising from the fire, last fall, she smiled and said it was like old times to her—but she added, quaintly, that palms did not itch when the veins showed blue.

"Nonsense," I said, "we are both of us young, Letitia. Let us find the crone and hear her croak. I am not afraid of a little sorcery."

Paying no heed to her protestations I turned

Pegasus—I have always a Pegasus, whatever my horse's other name—through the meadow-gate. A ragged, brown-faced boy ran out to us and held the bridle while I alighted, and then I turned and offered Letitia a helping hand. She shook her head.

"No, I'll wait here."

"Come," I said, "have you no faith, Letitia?"

"Not any more," she replied. "This is foolishness, Bertram. Will you never grow up?"

"It's only my second-childhood," I explained. "Come, we'll see the vans."

"Some one will see us," she protested.

"There is not a soul on the road," I said.

Shamefacedly she took my hand, glancing uneasily at the highway we had left behind us, and her face flushed as we approached the fire. An ugly old woman with a dirty kerchief about her head, was stirring broth for the evening meal.

"Tripod and kettle," I said. "Do you remember this ancient dame?"

"Yes," said Letitia, "it is—"

"Sibyl," I said. "Her name is Sibyl."

Letitia smiled.

"Do you remember me?" she asked, offering her hand. The old witch peered cunningly into

her face, grinning and nodding as if in answer. Two or three scraggy, evil-eyed vagabonds were currying horses and idling about the camp, watching us, but at a glance from the fortune-teller, they slouched streamward. The crone's entreaties and my own were of no avail. Letitia put her hands behind her—but we saw the vans and patted the horses and crossed the woman's palm so that she followed us, beaming and babbling, to the carriage-side. There we were scarcely seated when, stepping forward — so suddenly that I glanced, startled, towards the camp—the gypsy laid a brown hand, strong as a man's, upon the reins; and turning then upon Letitia with a look so grim and mysterious that she grew quite pale beneath those tragic eyes, muttered a jargon of which we made out nothing but the words:

"You are going on a long journey," at which the woman stopped, and taking a backward step, stood there silently and without a smile, gazing upon us till we were gone.

Letitia laughed uneasily as we drove away.

"Did she really remember you?" I asked.

"No, I don't think so—which makes it the more surprising."

"Surprising?"

"Yes; that she should have said again what she always told me."

"And what was that?"

"That I was going on a long journey."

"Did she always tell you that?"

"Always, from the very first."

"Perhaps she tells every one so," I suggested.

"No, for I used to ask, and very particularly, as to that."

Why, I wondered, had she been so curious about long journeys? I had never known travel to absorb her thoughts. Why had she inquired, and always so very particularly, as she confessed, about that single item of gypsy prophecy, and the very one which would seem least likely to be verified? Never in my knowledge of Letitia's lifetime had there been any other promise than that of the fortune-teller that she would ever wander from Grassy Ford. I might have asked her, but she seemed silent and depressed as we drove homeward, which was due, I fancied, to the gypsy's rude alarm. For some days after she continued to remark how strangely that repetition of the old augury had sounded in her ears, and smiling at it, she confessed how in

former years she had laid more stress upon it, and had even planned what her gowns would be.

"Did you guess where you were going?" I ventured to inquire.

"Well, I rather hoped—"

"Yes?" I said.

"You know my fondness for history," she continued. "I rather hoped I should see some day what I had read about so long—castles and things—and then, too, there were the novels I was fond of, like *Lorna Doone*. I always wanted to see the moors and the Doone Valley, and the water-slide that little John Ridd had found so slippery, when he first saw Lorna."

"You wanted to see England then," I said.

"Yes, England," she replied. "England, you know, was my father's country."

"The Doone Valley," I remarked, "would be Devon, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," she replied, "and it was Devon where father was a boy."

"And our old friend Robin Saxeholm came from Devon, you know," I said.

"So he did," she answered. Then we talked of Robin and his visit to Grassy Fordshire years ago, and what Letitia had forgotten of it I re-

called to her, and what I could not remember, she supplied, so that it all came back to us like a story or a summer dream.

When she had gone up-stairs I sat for a long time smoking by the dying fire, and musing of some old-time matters which now came back to me in a clearer light. From thinking of my own youth, little by little, I came to Robin's—I mean the younger, who was now so soon to be a man. Tall and fair like the youth he was named for, though not red-haired, he had all but completed that little learning which is a "dangerous thing": he was a high-school senior now, and overwhelmed sometimes with the wonder of it, but a manly fellow for all that, one whom my eyes dwelt fondly on more often than he knew. In the springtime he would have his parchment; college would follow in the fall—college! What could I do to give my son a broader vision of the universe, lest with only Grassy Ford behind him, he should think the outside world lay mostly within his college walls?

"You are going on a long journey."

The gypsy's words came back unbidden as I rose by the embers of the fire. "A long journey," I repeated; "and why not?"

IV

AN UNEXPECTED LETTER

DURING the winter a great piece of news stirred Grassy Ford, and in spite of the snow-drifts on our walks and porches furnished an excuse for a dozen calls that otherwise would never have been made so soon. Old Mrs. Luton was discovered in a state of apoplexy on our steps, but on being brought in and divested of her husband's coon-skin cap, a plush collar, a scarf, a shawl, a knitted jacket, and a newspaper folded across her chest, recovered her breath and told her story. Mrs. Neal, so Mrs. Luton said, had been heard to say, according to Mrs. Withers, who had it from Mrs. Lowell, who lived next door to Mrs. Bell—who, as the world knows, called more often than anybody else at the Neal farm-house, feeling a pity for the lonely woman there, as who did not?—Mrs. Neal had

been heard to say, what Mrs. Luton would not have repeated for the world to any one but her dear Miss Primrose, who could be trusted implicitly, as she knew, and she had said it in the most casual way—Mrs. Neal, that is—but secretly very well pleased, though, Heaven knows, she, Mrs. Luton—

"Won't you have some coffee?" asked Letitia, for the breakfast was not yet cold.

"Yes, thank you, I *will*, for I'm as cold as can be," exclaimed her visitor, laughing hysterically, and she was profuse in her praise of Letitia's beverage, and inquired the brand. Her manner of sipping it as she sat in an easy-chair before the fire did away with all necessity for a spoon, but was a little trying to a delicate sense of hearing like Letitia's, and was responsible beside for what was wellnigh a disastrous deluge when in the midst of a copious ingurgitation she suddenly remembered what she had come to tell:

"*Ffff*—Peggy Neal's a-living in New York!" she splashed, her eyes popping. It would be impossible to relate the story as Mrs. Luton told it, for its ramifications and parentheses involved the history of Grassy Ford and the manifold

relationships of its inhabitants, past and present, to say nothing of the time to come, for in speculations Mrs. Luton was profound.

Mrs. Neal, it seems, had broken her long silence and had been heard to allude to "my daughter Peggy in New York." Some years had passed since the farm-gate clicked behind that forlorn and outcast girl, and in all that time the mother had never spoken the daughter's name, nor had any one dared more than once to question her. Letitia had tried once, but once only, to intercede for the pupil she had loved, the manner of whose departure was well enough understood in the town and country-side, though where she had gone remained a mystery.

On leaving the farm that September evening, Peggy, with a desperate and tear-stained face, had been met by a neighbor girl, who as a confidant in happier hours, was intrusted with the story. It was not a long one. The mother had pointed to the gate.

"Look there!" she cried. "*He* went that way. I guess you'll find him, if you try, you—"

Then her mother struck her, Peggy said. She did not know it was the name which felled her.

Now after silence which had seemed like death

to the lonely woman in the hills, Peggy had written home to her, to beg forgiveness, to say that in a life of ease and luxury in a great city, she could not help thinking of the farm, which seemed a dream to her; she could never return to it, she said, but she wondered if her father was living, and if her mother had still some heart for her wayward daughter, and would write sometimes. She said nothing of a child. That she was still unmarried seemed evident from the signature—"Your loving, loving Peggy Neal." That some good-fortune had befallen her in spite of that sad beginning in her native fields, was quite as clear, for the paper on which she had scrawled her message was of finest texture and delicately perfumed; and, what was more, between its pages the mother had found a sum of money, how much or little no one knew.

It was observed that the mother's face had relaxed a little. That she had answered her daughter's message was asserted positively by Mrs. Bell, though what that answer was, and whether forgiveness or not, she did not know. It was assumed, however, to have been a pardon, for the mother seemed pleased with the daughter's progress in the world, which must have

seemed to her the realization, however ironical, of her discarded hopes; and it was she herself who had divulged the contents of the letter. To the cautious curiosity manifested by elderly ladies of Grassy Ford, who called upon her now more often than had been their wont, as she took some pleasure in reminding them, to their obvious discomfiture, and to all other hints and allusions she turned her deafer ear, while to direct questions she contented herself with the simple answer:

"Peggy's well."

"You hear from her often, I suppose?" some caller ventured. The reply was puzzling:

"Oh, a mother's apt to."

She said it so sadly, looking away across the farm, that Letitia's informant as she told the story burst into tears.

"She's a miserable woman, Miss Letitia, depend upon it. She's a miserable, broken-down, heart-sick creature for what she's done. 'You hear often, I suppose?' said I. 'A mother's apt to,' says she, and turned away from me with a face so lonesome as would break your heart."

For myself, as Letitia told me, I had my own

notion of the mother's sad and evasive answer, but I held my peace.

It was the coldest winter we had known in years. For weeks at a time our valley was a bowl of snow, roads were impassable, and stock was frozen on the upland farms. Suddenly there came a thaw: the sun shone brightly, the great drifts sank and melted into muddy streams, and early one morning Farmer Bell, his shaggy mare and old top-buggy splashed with mire and his white face spattered, stopped at the post-office and called loudly to the passers-by.

"Old Neal's dead and I want the coroner."

To the crowd that gathered he told the story. Neal's wife, waiting up for him Christmas night, had made an effort to reach the Bells to ask for tidings, but the wind was frightful and the drifts already beyond her depth. She had gone back hoping that he was safe by his tavern fire, but she sat by her own all night, listening to the roaring of the wind and the rattling windows through which the snow came drifting in. At dawn, from an upper chamber, she peered out upon a sight that is seldom seen even in these northern hills. The storm was over, but the world was buried white; roads and fences and

even the smaller trees were no longer visible, and the barn and a neighbor's cottage were unfamiliar in their uncouth hoods. For days she remained imprisoned on the lonely farm. She cut paths from the woodshed to the near-by barn and saved the cattle in their stalls. Then the thaw came, and she reached the Bells.

Hitching his mare to his lightest buggy, for the roads were rivers, the farmer drove through the slush and the remnant drifts to the corner tavern where Neal had been. The bartender stared blankly at his first question.

"Neal?" he stammered out at last.

"Yes, Neal! *John* Neal, confound you! Can't you speak?"

The man laid the glass he was wiping upon the bar.

"Neal left here Christmas day—along about four in the afternoon, when the storm began."

As Bell drove homeward he saw two figures at the Neal farm-gate—that gate which Peggy had closed behind her—and, coming nearer, he made out his own man Tom and the widow, lifting the body from the melting snow.

Peggy Neal did not come to her father's funeral. Letitia herself would have written the

news to her, for the woman, dry-eyed and dumb and sitting by the coffin-side, had aged in a day and was now as helpless as a child.

"Shall I write to Peggy?" Letitia asked her, but she did not hear. Twice the question was repeated, but they got no answer, so Letitia wrote, and laid the letter on the casket, open and unaddressed. It was never sent.

V

SURPRISES

JOGGING homeward from a country call one afternoon in May, I was admiring the apple-orchards and the new-ploughed fields between them, when I chanced upon my son Robin with a handful of columbine, gathered among the Sun Dial rocks.

"Oh," said he, "is that you, father?" It is an innocent way of his when he has anything in particular to conceal.

"At any rate," I replied, "you are my son."

He smiled amiably and I cranked the wheel, making room for him beside me.

"Columbine," I remarked.

"Yes."

"Letitia will be pleased," I said.

Now I knew it was for the Parker girl—Rita Parker, who blushes so when I chance to meet

her that I know now how it feels to be an ogre, a much-maligned being, too, for whom I never had any sympathy before.

"I just saw a redstart," remarked my son.

"So?" I replied. "Did you notice any bobolinks?"

"*Did* I?" he answered. "I saw a million of them."

"You did?"

"Down in the meadows there."

"A million of them?"

"Almost a million," he replied. "Every grass-stalk had one on it, teetering and singing away like anything."

"Why, I didn't know Rita was with you."

"Rita!" he exclaimed, reddening.

"Why, yes," I said. "You saw so many birds, you know."

It was a little hard upon the boy, but I broke the ensuing silence with some comments on the weather, and having him wholly at my mercy then, I chose a subject which so long had charmed me, I had been on the point of telling him time and again, yet had refrained.

"Robin," said I, "you will be a graduate in a

day or two. What do you say to a summer in England, boy?"

He caught my hand—so violently that the rein was drawn and Pegasus turned obediently into the ditch and stopped.

"England, father!"

"If we are spared," I said, getting the buggy into the road again.

"All of us!" he cried.

"No."

"But you'll come, father?" He said it so anxiously that I was touched. It isn't always that a boy cares to lug his father.

"I should like to," I said, "but—no."

"Why not?"

"I cannot leave," I replied. "Jamieson's going. We can't both go."

"Oh, bother Jamieson!" Robin exclaimed. "What does he want to choose *our* year for? Why can't he wait till next?"

"It's his wife," I explained. "She's ill again. But you go, Robin, and take Letitia."

"When do we start?"

"In June."

"*This* June?"

"Next month. I've laid out the journey for

you on a map, and I've got the names of the inns to stop at, and what it will cost you, and everything else."

"But when did you think of it?" asked my son.

"Last fall."

"Last fall! Does Aunt Letty know?"

"Partly," I said. "She knows you're going, but not herself. It's a little surprise for her. You may tell her yourself, now, while I stop at the office."

He scrambled out and hitched my horse for me, so I held the flowers. He flushed a little as he took them.

"Father, you're a trump," he said.

I bowed slightly: it is wise to be courteous even to a son. I had stopped at the office to get the map, and an hour later Letitia met me in our doorway.

"Bertram!" she said, taking my hand.

"Robin told you?"

"Yes. Oh, it's beautiful, Bertram, but I cannot go."

"Nonsense," I said.

"But you?"

"I shall do very nicely."

"But the cost?"

"Will be nothing," I said. "The boy must not go alone."

"That's not the reason you are sending me, Bertram."

"It's a good one," I replied.

"No," she insisted, shaking her head.

"You have been good to the boy, Letitia," I explained. "This is only a way of saying that I know."

"You do not need to say it," she replied. "I have done nothing."

"You have done everything, Letitia—for us both."

The tears ran down her cheeks. My own eyes—

"You have loved Dove's husband and son," I told her. "We shall not forget it."

Her face was radiant.

"It has been nothing for me to do," she said. "Loving no one in particular, I have had the time to love every one, don't you see? Why, all my life, Bertram, I've loved other people's dogs, and other people's children"—she paused a moment and added, smiling through her tears—"and other people's husbands, I suppose."

"You will go?" I asked.

"I should love to go."

"You will go, Letitia?"

"I will go," she said.

That evening I took from my pocket a brand-new map of the British Isles—I mean brand-new last fall. Many a pleasant hour I had spent that winter at the office with a red guide-book and the map before me on my desk. With no little pride I spread it now on the sitting-room table which Letitia had cleared for me.

"What are the red lines, father?" asked my son. He had returned breathless from telling the Parker girl.

"Those in red ink," I replied, "I drew myself. It is your route. There's Southampton—where you land — and there's London — and there's Windsor and Oxford and Stratford and Warwick and Kenilworth—and here," I cried, sweeping my hand suddenly downward to the left—"here's Devonshire!"

"Where father was a boy," Letitia murmured, touching the pinkish county tenderly with her hand.

Ah, I was primed for them! There was not a question they could ask that I could not answer.

There was not a village they could name, I could not instantly put my finger on. Those winter hours had not been spent in vain. I knew the inns—the King's Arms, the Golden Lion, the White Hart, the Star and Anchor, the George and Dragon, the Ring o' Bells! I knew where the castles were—I had marked them blue. I knew the battle-fields—I had made them crimson. For each cathedral—a purple cross. Each famous school—a golden star. Never, I believe, was there such a map before—for convenience, for ready reference: one look at the margin where I made the notes—a glance at the map—and there you were!

"Oh, it is beautiful!" exclaimed Letitia.

"Isn't it?" I cried.

"You should have it patented," said my son.

"Suppose," I suggested, "you ask me something — something hard now. Ask me something hard."

I took a turn with my cigar. Robin knitted his brows, but could think of nothing. Letitia pondered.

"Where's—"

She hesitated.

"Out with it!" I urged.

"Where's Tavistock?" she asked.

I thought a moment.

"Is it a castle?"

She shook her head.

"Is it a battle-field?"

"No."

"Is it just a town, then?"

"Yes, just a town."

"Did anything famous happen there?"

She hesitated.

"Well," she said, "perhaps nothing *very* famous—but it's an old little town—one that I've heard of, that is all."

Well, she did have me. It was not very famous, and only a—an idea came to me.

"Oh," I said, shutting my eyes a moment, "that town's in Devon."

Letitia nodded.

"See," I said. Adjusting my glasses, and peering a moment at the pinkish patch, I tapped it, Tavistock, with my finger-nail. "Right here," I said.

We made a night of it—that is, it was midnight when I folded my map and locked it away with the guide-book and the table of English money I had made myself. There was one in

the book, it is true, but for ready reference, for convenience in emergencies, it did not compare with mine—mine worked three ways.

A fortnight later I had the tickets in my hand —ss. *Atlantis*, date of sailing, the tenth of June. I myself was to steal a day or two and wave farewell to them from the pier. Robin already had packed his grip; indeed, he repacked it daily, to get the hang of it, he said. It was a new one which I had kept all winter at the office in the bottom of a cupboard, and it bore the initials, R. W., stamped on the end. And he had a housewife—a kind of cousin to a needle-book—stuffed full of handy mending-things, presented by the Parker girl. The boy was radiant, but as June drew nigh I saw he had something heavy on his mind. A dozen times he had begun to speak to me, privately, but had changed the subject or had walked away. I could not imagine what ailed the fellow. He seemed restless; even, as I fancied, a little sad at times, which troubled me. I made opportunities for him to speak, but he failed to do so, either through neglect or fear. I saw him often at the office, where he was always bursting in upon me with some new plan or handy matter for his

precious bag. He had bought a razor and a brush and strop.

"But what are they for?" I asked, amazed. A blush mantled his beardless cheeks.

"Those? Oh—just to be sure," he said.

Now what could be troubling the lad, I wondered? It was something not always on his mind, for he seemed to forget it in preparations, but it lurked near by to spring out upon his blithest moments. His face would be shining; an instant later it would fall, and he would walk to the window and gaze out thoughtfully into the street, in a way that touched me to the heart, for, remember, this was to be my first parting with the boy. The more I thought of it, the more perplexed I was; and the more I wondered, the more I felt it might be my duty to speak myself.

"Robin," I said one day, and as casually as I could make my tone, "did you want to tell me anything? What is it? Speak, my boy."

We were alone together in my inner office and the door was shut. He walked resolutely to the desk where I was sitting.

"Father," he said, "I have."

My heart was beating, he looked so grave.

"Well," I remarked, "you have nothing to fear, you know."

"Father," he said, doggedly, "it's about—it's about—"

"Yes?" I encouraged him.

"It's about this trip."

"This trip?"

"Yes. It's about—father, *you'll* tell her—"

"Tell her?" I repeated.

"Yes. You tell her."

"Tell whom? Tell what?"

"Why, Aunt Letty."

"Aunt Letty! Tell Aunt Letty what?"

He blurted it fiercely:

"About her hat."

"Her hat! Her hat! Good Lord, what hat?"

"Why, her Sunday hat!"

"You mean her—"

"Why, yes, father! You know that hat."

I knew that hat.

"Do you object," I asked, "to your aunt's best Sunday hat?"

His scowl vanished and his face broke into smiles.

"That's it," he said.

"Don't be alarmed," I assured him, keeping

my own face steady—no easy matter, for, as I say, I knew the hat. "Don't be alarmed, my son. She shall have a new one, if that will please you."

His smiles vanished. He seemed suspicious. His tone was cautiousness itself.

"But who will buy it?" he asked.

"Why, you!" I said.

He leaped to my side.

"*I?*"

"You," I repeated.

He laughed hysterically—whooped is the better word.

"You wait!" he cried, and, fairly dancing, he seized his cap and rushed madly for the door. It shut behind him, but as swiftly opened again.

"Oh, dad," he said, beaming upon me from the crack, "it 'll be a stunner! You'll see."

It was.

VI

AN OLD FRIEND OF OURS

"OH, I know the town," I had told them confidently—had I not been there in 18—? But no, it was not my town. It was not my New York at all that we found at our journey's end, but belonged apparently to the mob we fell among, bags and bundles, by the station steps, till from our cabman's manner, when I mildly marvelled at the fare he charged us, the place, I suspected, belonged to him. Four days and nights we heard it rumbling about us. Robin got a mote in his eye, Letitia lost her brand-new parasol, and I broke my glasses—but we saw the parks and the squares and the tall buildings and the statue which Johnny Keats never climbed. Reluctantly, for the day was waning as we stood on the Battery looking out at it across the bay, we followed his

example. On the third afternoon Letitia proposed a change of plans. Her eyes, she confessed, were a little tired with our much looking. Why not hunt old friends?

"Old friends?" I asked. "Whom do we know in New York, Letitia?"

"Why, don't you remember Hiram Ptolemy and Peggy Neal?"

"To be sure," I said—"the Egyptologist! But the addresses?"

"I have them both," she replied. "Mrs. Neal came to the house crying, and gave me Peggy's, and begged me to find her if I could. And Mr. Ptolemy—why can I never remember the name of his hotel?"

"You have heard from him then?"

She blushed.

"Yes," she replied. "It's a famous hotel, I'm sure. The name was familiar."

"Hotel," I remarked. "Hiram must be getting on then?"

"Oh yes," she said, fumbling with her address-book. "It's the Mills Hotel."

"And a famous place," I observed, smiling. "So he lives at a Mills Hotel?"

"I forgot to tell you," she continued, "I have

been so busy. He wrote me only the other day, that, after all these years—mercy! how long it has been since he fed us lemon-drops!—after all these years of tramping from publisher to publisher, footsore and weary, as he said, he had found at last a grand, good man."

"One," I inferred, "who will give his discovery to the world."

"Oh, more than that," explained Letitia, "this dear, old, white-haired—"

"Egyptologist," I broke in.

"Publisher," she said, with spirit, "has promised him to start a magazine and make him editor—a scientific magazine devoted solely to Egyptology, and called *The Obelisk*."

"Well, well, well, well," I said. "We must congratulate the little man. Perhaps you may even be impelled to recon—"

"Now, Bertram," began Letitia, in that tone and manner I knew of old—so I put on my hat, and, freeing Robin to likelier pleasures, we drove at once to "the" Mills Hotel. Letitia's address-book had named the street, which she thought unkempt and cluttered and noisy for an editor to live in, though doubtless he had wished to be near his desk.

"Is Mr. Hiram Ptolemy in?" inquired Letitia.

"I'll see," said the clerk, consulting his ledgers.

He returned at once.

"There is no one here of that name, madam."

"Strange!" she replied. "He was here—let me see—but two weeks ago."

"No madam," he said. "You must mean the other Mills Hotel."

"Is there another Mills Hotel?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied. "Hotel number —"

"I *thought*," said Letitia, "this place seemed—"

She glanced about her.

"But," said I, "the address is of this one."

"True," she replied. "Did you look in the P's?" she inquired, sweetly.

"Why, no; in the T's. You said—"

"But it's spelled with a P," she explained. "P-t-o-l—"

Then her face reddened.

"Never mind," she said. "You are right—quite right. It *is* the other hotel. But can you tell me, please, if Mr. Hiram De Lancey Percival lives here?"

The clerk smiled broadly.

"Oh yes," he said. "Mr. Percival does, but

he's out at present. You will find him, however, at this address."

He wrote it down for her and she took it nervously.

"Thank you," she said, glancing at it. "Don't be silly, Bertram. Yes, it's the publisher's. Let us go. Good-day, sir."

It was not a large publisher's, we discovered, for the place was a single and dingy store-room in a small side street. Its walls were shelved, filled from the floor to the very ceiling—volume after volume, sets upon sets, most of them shop-worn and bearing the imprints of by-gone years. Between the shelves other books, equally old and faded, and offered for sale at trifling prices, lay on tables in that tempting disarray and dust which hints of treasures overlooked and waiting only for recognition—always on the higher shelf, or at the bottom of the other pile. The window was filled with encyclopædias long outgrown by a wiser world, and standing beside them, and looking back towards the store-room's farther end; was a melancholy vista of discarded and forgotten literature.

"Who buys them?" asked Letitia.

"Who wrote them?" I replied.

A bell had tinkled at our entrance, but no one came to us, so we wandered down one narrow aisle till we reached the end. And there, at the right, in an alcove hitherto undiscernable, and at an old, worm-eaten desk dimly lighted by an alley window, sat our old friend Ptolemy, writing, and unaware of our approach. It was the same Hiram, we observed, though a little shabbier, perhaps, and scraggier-bearded than of old, but the same little, blinking scientist we had known, in steel-bowed spectacles, scratching away in a rickety office-chair. He was quite oblivious of the eyes upon him, lost, doubtless, in some shadowy passage of Egyptian lore.

I coughed slightly, and he turned about, peering in amazement.

"Miss Primrose! Dr. Weatherby! I do believe!" he exclaimed, and, dropping his pen, staggered up to us and shook our hands, his celluloid cuffs rattling about his meagre wrists and his eyes watering with agitation behind his spectacles.

"*You*—in New York!" he piped. "I—why, I'm astounded—I'm astounded—but delighted, too — de*light*ed to see you both! But you mustn't stand."

I looked curiously at Letitia as he brought us chairs, setting them beside his desk. She was a little flushed, but very gracious to the little man.

"Miss Primrose," he said, fidgeting about her, "allow me—allow me," offering what seemed to be the stabler of the wooden seats. She had accepted it and was about to sit, when he stopped her anxiously with a cry, "Wait!—wait, I beg of you!" and replaced it with his own. His was an elbow chair whose sagging leathern seat had been reinforced with an old green atlas, its pasteboard cover still faintly decorated with a pictured globe.

Seating himself again beside his desk, he turned to us beaming with an air of host, and listened with many nervous twitchings and furtive glances at Letitia, while I explained our presence there.

"It's a grand journey—a grand journey, Miss Primrose," he declared. "I only wish I were going, too."

"Tell us," said Letitia, kindly, "about *The Obelisk*. Is the first number ready yet?"

He sat up blithely, wetting his lips, and with that odd mannerism which recalled his visit to

Grassy Ford, he touched with one finger the tip of his celluloid collar, and thrust out his chin.

"Almost," he said. "It's almost ready. It 'll be out soon—very soon now—it 'll be out soon. I've got it here—right here—right here on the desk."

He touched fondly the very manuscript we had surprised him writing.

"That's it," he said. "*The Obelisk*, volume one, number one."

"And the great stone of Iris-Iris?" queried Letitia.

He half rose from his chair, and exclaimed, excitedly, pointing to a drawer in the paper-buried desk:

"Right there! The cut is there!—cut of the inscription, you know. It's to be the frontispiece. Here: page one—my story—story of the translation and how I made it, and what it means to the civilized world. Don't fail to read it!"

He wiped his glasses.

"When," I asked, "will it be out?"

"Soon," he replied. "Soon, I hope. Not later than the fall."

"That's some time off yet," I remarked.

"You do not understand," he replied, anxiously. "You do not understand, Dr. Weatherby. A magazine requires great preparation—great preparation, sir—and particularly a scientific magazine, Dr. Weatherby."

"Ah," I said. "I see."

"*Great* preparation, sir," the little man went on, leaning forward and tapping me on the knee. "There must be subscribers, sir."

"To be sure," I assented. "They are quite essential, I believe."

"Very," said Hiram Ptolemy. "Very, sir. We must have fifty at the fewest before we go to press. My publisher is obdurate—fifty, he says, or he will not invest a penny—not a penny, sir."

"And you have already—?" I inquired. I was sorry afterwards to have asked the question. It was not delicate. I asked it thoughtlessly, intending only to evince my interest in the cause. Coloring slightly, he wet his lips and cleared his throat before replying.

"One, sir; only one, as yet."

"Then put me down number two," I said, eager to retrieve my blunder.

His face lighted, but only for a moment, and

turning an embarrassed countenance upon Letitia, and then on me, he stammered:

"But I—"

"Oh, by all means, Bertram," said Letitia, "we must subscribe."

The Egyptologist swallowed hard.

"I think—" he began.

"Bertram Weatherby is the name, Mr. Percival," said Letitia, in a clear, insistent tone, and at her bidding the little man scrawled it down, but so tremulously at first that he tore up the sheet and tried again.

"And the subscription price?" I inquired, opening my pocket-book.

"You—you needn't pay now, doctor," he replied.

"Is one dollar a year," said Letitia, promptly, and I laid the bill upon the desk.

Hiram Ptolemy touched it gingerly, fumbled it, dropped it by his chair, and, still preserving his embarrassed silence, fished it up again from the cluttered floor. Ten minutes later, when we said farewell to him, he still held it in his hand.

"What was the matter with him?" I asked Letitia, as we drove away, glancing back at that

odd and shamefaced figure standing wistfully in the doorway.

"The other subscriber," she replied. "Didn't you guess?"

"What!" I said. "You, Letitia?"

She smiled sadly.

"Poor little man!"

VII

SUZANNE

IT was evening when we set out, not without trepidation, to find Peggy Neal. We had dined—over-dined—in a room of gilt and mirrors and shining silver, watching the other tables with their smiling groups or puzzling pairs; some so ill-assorted that we strove vainly to solve their mystery, others so oddly mannered for a public place, we thought—the men so brazen in their attentions, the women so prinked and absurdly gowned and unabashed, Letitia at first was not quite sure we were rightly there.

"Still," she said, "there *are* nice people here—why, even children!"

"The place is famous," I protested.

"I suppose it must be respectable," she replied, "but I never saw such a *mixture!*"

She gazed wonderingly about her.

"I suppose it must be New York," she said.

It was half-past eight when we entered the street again. We drove at once to the number Mrs. Neal had given, riding silently and a little nervously, but still marvelling at the scene we had left behind us, a strange setting for two such elder village-folk as we, making us wonder if we had missed much or little by living our lives so greenly and far away.

"I hope she will be at home," said Letitia. "Every one seemed to be going to the theatre."

"For my part," I confessed, "I rather hope we shall not find her."

"But why, Bertram?"

I could not say. The cab stopped. There were lights in the house, and, leaving Letitia, I went up the steps and pulled the bell. The household was at home, apparently, for I heard voices and the music of a piano as I stood waiting at the door. It was one of the older streets, ill-lighted and lined monotonously by those red-brick fronts so fashionable in a former day.

The door was opened by a colored maid, and there was a gush of laughter and the voices of

men and women, with the tinkling undercurrent of a waltz.

"Is Miss Neal at home?" I asked.

"Miss who?"

"Miss Neal."

"Miss Neal?"

"Miss Peggy Neal."

She hesitated. "I'll see," she said. "Will you come in, suh?"

"No," I replied. "I'll wait out here."

She returned presently.

"Did you say Miss Peggy Neal, suh?"

"Yes," I replied, "Miss Peggy Neal."

"Don't any such lady live heah, suh."

"Strange," I murmured, and was about to turn away when a woman clad in a floating light-blue robe, her face indefinite in the dimly illumined hallway, but apparently young and pretty, or even beautiful, perhaps, and with an amazing quantity of golden hair, slipped through the portières and pushed aside the maid.

"I am Peggy Neal," she said, in a low voice. "What is wanted?"

"You!" I gasped, but Letitia had left the carriage and was at my shoulder.

"Peggy!" she said.

"Miss Primrose! And this is—Dr. Weatherby!"

"Dear Peggy," Letitia murmured, kissing the astonished girl on both powdered cheeks. "But how you've changed! You're so pale, Peggy—and your eyes—and your hair—Peggy, what *have* you done to your hair?"

"Yes, my hair," murmured Peggy.

"Why, it used to be jet," Letitia said. "But you don't ask us in, my dear—and here we've come all the long way from Grassy Ford to see you."

"Hush!" said Peggy, and Letitia paused, for the first time noting the voices in the inner rooms.

"Oh," she whispered, "I see: you have a party."

"Yes," Peggy answered. "We—we have a party."

"I think we should go, Letitia," I interposed, but she did not hear me.

"I can't get over your hair," she murmured, holding Peggy at arm's-length from her and then turning her head a little to look about her. "Do they smoke at your parties?" she asked.

"Oh yes," laughed Peggy, "all the men smoke, you know."

"But I thought," said Letitia, "I saw a woman with a cigarette."

"It may have been a — candy cigarette," Peggy answered.

"That's true," said Letitia, "for I've seen them at Marvin's in Grassy Ford."

The portières before which Peggy stood, one hand grasping them, parted suddenly behind her head, and the face of another girl was thrust out rudely behind her own and staring into mine. It was a rouged and powdered face, with hard-set eyes that did not flinch as she gazed mockingly upon me, crying in a voice that filled the hall with its harsh discords:

"Aha! Which one to-night, Suzanne?"

Then she saw Letitia, and with a smothered oath, withdrew laughingly. The music and talking ceased within. It was not in the room behind the curtains, but seemingly just beyond it, and I could hear her there relating her discovery as I supposed, though the words were indistinct.

"How I hate that girl!" hissed Peggy, her eyes black with anger.

"Then I wouldn't have her, my dear," said Letitia, soothingly. "I should not invite her."

There was a burst of laughter within, followed by subdued voices, and I heard footsteps stealthily approaching. Peggy heard them too, no doubt, though she was answering Letitia's questions, for she grasped the curtains more tightly than before, one hand behind her and the other above her head. As she did so the loose sleeves of her robe slipped down her arm, disclosing a spot upon its whiteness.

"Peggy, dear," Letitia said, anxiously, "you have hurt yourself."

"Yes," was the answer, "I know. It's a bruise."

It was a heart, tattooed. She hid it in her hair.

"We must go, Letitia," I urged. "We must not keep Peggy from her friends."

"Yes," she assented. "But I had so much to ask you, Peggy, and so much to tell."

The curtains parted again, this time far above Peggy's head, and I saw a man's eyes peering through. She appeared to be disengaging the flounces about her slippered feet, but I saw her strike back savagely with her little heel, and he disappeared. But other faces came, one by one, though Letitia did not see them. Her eyes

were all for her darling Peggy whom she plied with questions. How had her health been? How did she like New York? Did she never yearn for little old Grassy Ford again? Was she quite happy?

"Yes," Peggy murmured, "quite; quite happy."

She spoke in a hurried, staccato voice, in an odd, cold monotone. There was no kindness in her eyes.

The door-bell rang, and we stepped aside as the maid answered it. Two young men swaggered in, flushed and garrulous, nodding, not more familiarly to the servant than to Peggy herself, who parted the curtains to let them pass. They gazed curiously at her guests.

"Why, they kept on their hats!" Letitia said, in a shocked undertone. "Is it customary here, Peggy?"

"Everything," was the bitter answer, "is customary here. How is my mother?"

"It was your mother, Peggy, who asked me to find you." Letitia spoke, gently. "She wants to see you. She is not very strong since your father's—"

She paused.

"Is my father dead?"

"Didn't you know?"

"No; but I thought as much; he was such a boozer."

Letitia stared. "Peggy!" she said.

"Oh, I know what you think," the girl replied, wearily, seating herself upon the stairs, and putting her chin upon her hands. She did not ask us to be seated.

"Letitia," I said, firmly, "come; we must go." I put my hand upon the door-knob.

"Doctor," said Peggy Neal, rising again, "you won't mind waiting outside a moment? I have something to say to dear Miss Primrose."

"Certainly," I replied. "Good-bye, Miss—Neal."

She gave her hand to me. "Good-bye, doctor." Then she looked me strangely in the eyes, saying in an undertone, "Mind, I shall tell her nothing"—and paused significantly, adding in a clearer tone again—"but the truth."

I waited anxiously upon the steps. Five minutes passed—ten—twenty—thirty—and I grew impatient. Then the door opened, and Letitia appeared with Peggy, and radiant though in tears.

"Good-bye," she said, kissing her, "dear, *dear* Peggy. Oh, Bertram, I have heard such a wonderful story!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes," Peggy said from the doorway, "Miss Primrose is the same enthusiast she used to be when I went to school to her."

"It is like a novel," declared Letitia; "but we must go. You must forgive me for keeping you so long away—from your newer friends."

"It is nothing," was the answer. "I'm so glad you came."

"Remember your promise, Peggy!"

"Oh yes—my promise," Peggy murmured. "Good-bye, Miss Primrose. Good-bye, doctor. Good-bye. Good-bye."

The carriage-door had scarcely closed upon us when Letitia seized my arm.

"Bertram," she said, "it *is* a story! I thought it was only in books that such things happened. I would not have missed this visit for the world!"

"But," I said, "do you trust—"

"Trust her? Yes. A woman never cries like that when she's lying, Bertram. Listen: she came to New York from Grassy Ford. He was nowhere to be found. He had given her a false

address. Then a little girl was born — dead. Oh, you can't imagine what that child's been through, Bertram!—the disgrace, the sorrow, the rags and poverty, hunger even—and only think how *we* were eating and sleeping soundly in Grassy Ford, all that time she was starving here! Then temptations came in this miserable, this wicked, wicked place! Oh, how can man—Well—she did not dare to come home, but stayed on here. It was then she took the name Suzanne, to hide her real one. Twice—twice, Bertram—she went down to the river—"

Letitia's voice was breaking.

"Oh, I can't tell you all she told me. But just when it all seemed darkest, she met this good, kind woman with whom she lives."

"What!" I said. "Did she tell you that?"

"Bertram, that woman saved her!—saved her from worse than death—took her from the very street—clothed her, fed her, and nursed her to health again. Did you see her dress? It was finest silk and lace. Did you see the rings on her fingers? One was a diamond, Bertram, as large as the pearl you wear; one was an opal, set in pearls; another, a ruby—and she told me she had a dozen more up-stairs."

"Who is this woman?"

"She did not tell me. I forgot to ask."

"What was the promise she made you?"

"To visit us—to come next summer to Grassy Ford."

"*Us*, Letitia?"

"Yes; I made her promise it. She refused at first, but I told her there were hearts as loving in Grassy Ford as in New York—oh, I hope there are, Bertram; I hope there are! She will go first to the farm, of course, to see her mother, and then, before she comes back to this new mother, who makes me burn, Bertram, when I ask myself if any woman in Grassy Ford would have done as much—then she will visit us. It will mean so much to her. It will set that poor, spoiled life right again before our petty, little, self-righteous world. Oh, I shall *make* them receive her, Bertram! I shall make them *take her in their arms!*"

She paused breathlessly, but I was silent.

"I thought you wouldn't mind," she said.

Still I could not speak.

"Tell me," she urged, "did I presume too much? Was I wrong to ask her without consulting you?"

"No," I answered—but not through kindness as Letitia thought, let me confess it; not through having the tenderest man's heart in the world, as she said, gratefully, but because I knew—how, she will always wonder—that Peggy would never come.

VIII

IN A DEVON LANE

HAVE never seen an English lane, but I have a picture of one above the fireplace, and I once smelled hawthorn blooming. A pleasant, hedgerow scent, it seemed to me, with a faint suggestion of primroses on the other side—I say primroses, but Letitia smiles when I declare I can smell them still, or laughs with Robin: they have been in England.

"Are you quite sure about it, Bertram?"

"They do have primroses," I reply, defiantly.

"But are you sure they are primroses?" she demands.

"Smell again, father!" cries my son.

"Yes," I retort; "or violets; they may be violets beyond the hedge."

It is then they laugh at me, and they make a great point of their puzzling questions: am I

certain—for example, that the primrose is fragrant enough to be smelled so far, and is it in flower when the hawthorn blooms? That is important, they insist. It is not important, I reply—in *my* England.

"*Your* England!" they cry.

"To be sure," I say. "In my England—and I see it as plainly as you do yours—the hawthorn and primrose is always flowering. In my England it is always spring."

It is summer in theirs. It is always cool and fragrant and wholly charming in my Devonshire. It was rather hot when they got to theirs—that is, the sunny coast of it they brag of was a little trying, sometimes, I suspect, in midsummer, though neither will confess.

"But not the moors!" they say.

"Oh, well—the moors—no; I should think not," I answer. "I am not such a fool as to think that moors are hot."

"How cool *are* the moors?" they then inquire, innocently, but I see the trick; I hear the plot in their very voices, and am wary.

"Oh," I reply, "as cool as usual."

"But there are dense forests on the moors," Robin suggests. "Regular jungles—eh, father?"

I am not to be taken without a struggle.

"Hm," I reply.

"Hm—what, father?"

"Well, I prefer the coast myself."

"The dear white coast," says Letitia, slyly.

"The dear *red* coast!" I cry in triumph, but they only sigh:

"Ah, it was a wonderful, wonderful journey! One could never imagine it—or even tell it. One must have been there."

It was a wonderful journey, I then admit, and I do not blame them for their pridefulness, but what, I ask, would they have done without my map?

I am bound by honesty to confess, however, that fair as my Devon is with the vales and moorlands I have never seen, Letitia's Devon must be fairer. She found it lovelier far than she had thought, she tells me, and she smiles so happily at the mere sound of its magic name—what, I ask, must a shire be made of to stand the test of that woman's dreams?

"Here we have hills," I tell her.

"But not those hills, Bertram."

"Have we not Sun Dial?" I protest.

"Yes, we have Sun Dial," she admits.

"We have winds," I say, "and singing waters, in Grassy Fordshire."

She shakes her head.

"You never heard the Dart or Tamar or the Tavy. You never stood on the abbey bridge."

"And where," I ask, "was that?"

"That was at Tavistock," she replies, "at dear little Tavistock after a rain, with the brown water rushing through the arches where the moss and fern and ivy clings—rushing over bowlders and swirling and foaming and falling beyond over a weir; then racing away under elm-trees and out into meadows—oh, you never heard the Tavy, Bertram."

"We have Troublesome," I insist.

"Yes," she replies, but her mind is absent. "We have Troublesome, to be sure."

Then I rouse myself. I fairly menace her with her treason.

"Surely," I cry, "you do not prefer old Devon to Grassy Fordshire!"

It is a question she never answers.

"Grassy Fordshire is your native heath," I remind her, jealously.

"Devon was my father's," she replies, "and mother's, too."

"Still," I insist, "you do not prefer it to your own?"

"It is beautiful," is her answer.

Had ever man so exasperating an antagonist? She declines utterly to be convinced; she talks of nothing but that ruddy land as if it always had been hers to boast of, is forever telling of ancient villages cuddled down in the softest corners of its hills and headlands to doze and dream in the English cloud-shadows and the sun—some of them lulled, she says, by the moorland music of winds among the granite tors, and waters falling down, down through those pastoral valleys to the sea; some lapped by the salt waves rippling into coves blue and tranquil as the sky above them, and others still in a sterner setting, clinging to edges in the very clefts of a wild and rugged coast, like weed and sea-shells left there by the fury of the autumn storms. So, she tells me, her Devon is; so I picture it as we sit together by the winter fire, while for the thousandth time she tells her story: how she and Robin, with my map between them, made that long journey which, years before it, the gypsy had found forewritten in her hand. It was the very pilgrimage that as a boy I planned and

promised for myself when I should come to be a man, but have found no time for—yet my son has seen it, that land of the youth whose name he bears, so that, listening, I take his glowing word, as I took that of the youth before him, for its moorland heather and its flashing streams.

Robin, it seems, preferred north Devon—Lynton and Lynmouth and their crags and glens. Letitia, I note, while yet agreeing with his wildest adjectives, leans rather towards the south.

"But think," he says, "of Watersmeet and the Valley of Rocks, Aunt Letty!"

"I do think of them," she answers, "but think of Dartmoor, my dear."

"And so I do," is his reply.

"That day the wind blew so," she calls to mind, "that morning when we rode to Tavistock."

"Tavistock?" I always ask. "Tavistock? Where have I heard that name? Do all Devonshire roads lead up to Tavistock?"

She only smiles.

"You should see Tavistock," she says, and resumes her memories. I sit quite helpless between the combatants. They differ widely, one might think, to hear their voices rising and fall-

ing in warm debate, yet listening to their words I detect nothing but a rivalry of praise, an effort on the part of each to outdo the other, as I tell them, in pæans and benisons on what I am led inevitably to believe is the fairest of earthly dwelling-places.

When Robin withdraws his youthful vigor and goes off to bed, or if he is away at school, from which he writes such letters as I wish Dove could but see, the talk is tranquil by our hearth, or little by little drops quite away.

"Such lands breed men," observes Letitia for the hundredth time. It is her old, loved theory, the worth and grace of a rare environment, of which she speaks, sewing in the firelight. "The race must be hardy to wring its living from such shores and heights."

"True," I answer, thinking of the wreckers and smugglers who haunted those creeks and coves in years gone by—more lawless summers than the quiet one which found a woman on the very sands their heels had furrowed, or choosing flowers to press on the very cliffs they climbed with their spray-wet booty. I think vaguely of the soldiers and sailors who fought the battles whose dates and meanings it was Letitia's joy

to teach in the red-brick school-house. I think more vividly of great John Ridd and Amyas Leigh, and then—a clearer vision—I remember that other, that later Devonshire lad who was flesh and blood to me; and sitting here by my Grassy Fordshire fire, a man grown gray who was once a boy eating the slice two lovers spread for him, I keep their covenant.

You go up from Plymouth, Letitia tells me, and by-and-by you are on the moors, marvelling; and you like everything, but you love Tavistock. It is in a valley, with the Tavy running beneath that bridge of which she is forever dreaming, for, as she stood there watching the waters playing, and listening to their song, she said:

"Here Robert Saxeholm was a boy. How often he must have stood here!"

"Robin Saxeholm?" asked a clear voice almost at her side; and Letitia turned. A pretty English lady stood there smiling and offering her hand.

"Yes," said Letitia, "did you know him, too?"

The lady smiled—a sad little smile it was. She was in black.

"He was my husband," she replied, "and this"

—turning to the blue-eyed, fair-haired girl beside her "is Letitia Saxeholm."

"Why," my Robin cried—"why, that's—"

Letitia Primrose stopped him with a glance, and turning swiftly to that little English maid—

"*Letitia?*" she said, taking those pink cheeks gently between her hands, and kissing them wellnigh with every word she uttered. "Letitia—what a sweet—sweet name!"

THE END

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